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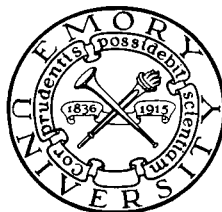
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THE
JEALOUS WIFE.

BY
MISS PARDOE,
AUTHOR OF
"RIVAL BEAUTIES," "CONFESSIONS OF A PRETTY WOMAN,"
ETC., ETC.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

THE JEALOUS WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY GROUP.

"Of course, Miss Trevanion—of course it must be as you see fit to decide," said a stately old gentleman, with snow-white hair, heavy black eyebrows, and a countenance which, although decidedly handsome, betokened alike haughtiness and obstinacy; "I am naturally as well aware as yourself, that you have long passed the age when I possessed a *legal* right to control you; and I can easily comprehend that you presume upon your position as an only child, to brave my wishes. Beware, however, before it is too late; for none—mark me well—*none* have ever done so with impunity since the commencement of my career. If you doubt this fact, you have only to inquire of your mother."

"Oh! pray, Mr. Trevanion," expostulated a nervous voice, issuing from amid a mass of costly shawls, and from the depths of a lounging chair, "let no appeal be made to me. It is bad enough to have my quiet disturbed by this altercation between you and Ida, without being required to interfere in it."

"Altercation, madam! What do you understand by the word altercation? You surely cannot comprehend its significance. There can be no altercation between a father and his child. The bare idea of such a thing is preposterous!"

"Well, perhaps it is. Substitute any other term you please. It is quite indifferent to me." And the complicated mass of drapery quivered for an instant, and then became once more motionless.

"Idiot! *woman!*" muttered the head of the family, as he paced slowly across the floor; then once more pausing before his daughter, who stood partially supported by a table on which her hand rested, he continued more audibly:—"You see, Miss Trevanion, that you must not calculate even upon the *powerful* protection of your mother. She disclaims all interference, and she is right; it *could* have done no good, and it *might* have done much evil."

"I trust that I require no protection, when I venture to urge on my own father the happiness of my future life," was the calm rejoinder of the lofty beauty, who seemed as resolute of will as her parent; and, as she spoke, her steady gaze, for the first time, rested upon his flushed and angry countenance.

Very beautiful, in truth, was the face thus lifted to his, although the freshness of girlhood had evidently passed away to give place to the rich loveliness of that next phase of female attraction, when every charm is ripened into full perfection; and the mind impresses a new power, unknown to mere thoughtless, unreflecting youth. Miss Trevanion had attained her twenty-sixth year; her intellect was fully developed; and a shade of her father's firmness gave additional expression to the large dark eyes and lofty brow, from which the raven hair was swept back in rich and massy folds. While Mrs. Trevanion crouched and cowered before the displeasure of her lord, her daughter stood erect. As she had said, the happiness of her whole life (according to her own view of the case) was at stake; and she was evidently prepared to maintain her legitimate position to the utmost.

"You know, Ida, that I cannot brook opposition"—was the next evasive remark of the old gentleman.

"Nor do I ever seek to offer any, as you are well aware, sir, when the point to be contested is of slight importance; but on this occasion——"

"Well, Miss Trevanion, on this occasion? Where are your rational reasons for such ill-timed rebellion? You are ambitious, indeed, if a peer of the realm will not satisfy your vanity."

The beauty shrugged her shoulders.

"I should not ask so much."

"Ha! I understand," thundered Mr. Trevanion, hurriedly resuming his walk; "you are in love—*You!* A rare jest, truly, but a dangerous one. Have I not warned you from your girlhood to avoid all follies of that nature until they had received my sanction?"

"You have."

"And how have you obeyed my commands?"

"As a woman ever does, until her heart teaches her that she is a free agent. I scorn all subterfuge. Had you addressed me in another tone, I might have regretted that it was not in my power to fulfil your wishes. As it is——"

"Pray, proceed, Miss Trevanion—pray, proceed."

"You have spared me that regret, sir."

"Ha! Indeed! Well, then, listen to *me*. You are our only child—*my* only child—but that fact shall avail you little, if you thus resolutely thwart my views. My uncle has a son. I hate them both, as you well know, and I have cause to do so; but, sooner than that my wealth should go to enrich the pauper whom you have chosen to accept as a suitor, that boy, detested as he is, shall be my heir."

A deep flush mantled on the cheek of his listener for a moment, but it faded as suddenly as it had risen, and she stood calm and unmoved as before.

"Yes," pursued Mr. Trevanion, passionately, "you do not require to be told to-day how bitterly I have, through life, resented the arrogance of my more fortunate relatives. How, the son of a younger son, I was insulted by the grudging offers of assistance which were to be doled out to me, in order to secure, at least, the means of existence to a poor relation—a berth on board an Indiaman, or the honour of carrying the colours in a regiment of foot—with full powers to make my own way when I was thus generously started in life. Law, Physic, or Divinity, were too costly to be thought of; they required previous training; and education involved expense. You know, also, how I disdained such pitiful assistance, and threw myself into commerce, in order to attain independence by my own unassisted efforts."

"And you acted nobly!" was the murmured rejoinder.

"Thank you; it is at least consolatory that I have earned the approval of my own child; of the daughter who, as I once hoped and believed, would have been enriched by my degradation—for that, as I have never forgotten, was the term applied by my aristocratic kinsman to my resolve to suffice to myself—but as you, Miss Trevanion, have willed it otherwise, I here solemnly declare, that should you obstinately adhere to your present insane project, I will leave all that I possess to Sir Jasper's son and heir."

"In that case, sir," said the lady steadily, "I must follow your example, and endeavour to suffice to myself."

"Be it so. Then you resolutely refuse to accept the hand of Lord Downmere?"

"I do."

"You had better take time to reflect."

"The question requires no reflection. I cannot sacrifice myself to the mere empty vanity of rank."

"You prefer beggary?"

"Decidedly—with a husband whom I could respect."

"You have more taste for the cotton gown of a pauper than the coronet of a countess?"

"Beyond all doubt—if I can wear it with more honour to myself."

"Ha!" groaned the irritated father; "this comes of an ill-assorted union—The mother's blood! The mother's blood!"

"Now, really, Mr. Trevanion," exclaimed the nervous voice of the closely-enveloped figure in the lounging chair, "you have no right to blame me for Ida's obstinacy; I am sure that I am as angry with her as you can be, for her folly in refusing the poor dear Earl; and, therefore, it is not generous in you to remind me that my father was only a merchant; for you well know that without his gold——"

"Silence, madam!" shouted the exasperated man; "are you, too, about to lecture me? Is it not enough that Miss Trevanion presumes to oppose her will to mine, without your forcing upon me the unpalatable fact that I found it expedient to further my fortunes by marrying your father's daughter?"

"I am sure, Mr. Trevanion——"

"You are sure of nothing, madam; how *can* you be so, when even *I* am thwarted and baffled at every turn? Be satisfied. I have bestowed on you one of the oldest, if not precisely one of the noblest, names in England: but still I cannot expect that you should feel as I do, the disgrace which this disobedient girl desires to bring upon a proud and ancient family."

"You might allow me to speak," whimpered the weak and trembling woman.

"You might speak till doomsday, were you likely to do so to any purpose," was the conciliating reply; "but I am now talking seriously to your daughter, and your idle interference is mistimed."

"Permit me to replace your cushion, mamma," said Miss Trevanion, as she observed that, in her agitation, her mother had sunk helplessly back in an uncomfortable position; but her attention was declined. The querulous woman waved her away with a repulsive gesture, as she impatiently murmured, "It is all your own fault. Why do you not marry Lord Downmere, and put an end to this disagreeable dispute? I am sure I only wish that I had been so lucky as to——Well, well, it is no use to talk of that now: but pray let there be an end of all this."

Miss Trevanion turned away; there was a strange expression of blended contempt and pity on her proud lip; but she made no reply.

The persons whom we have thus unceremoniously introduced to the reader, were, although so closely connected, as ill-suited to each other as it was possible for three human beings to be. Mr. Trevanion, the only son of a younger brother—who had, in early life and before he had adopted any settled profession, been so imprudent as to elope with the penniless daughter of an Irish peer, and to drag on a dependent and aimless existence under the roof of his more fortunate brother, the fourteenth baronet—was early left an orphan, his mother having died in giving him birth; while her husband only lived to see him reach his twelfth year. Accustomed, from his earliest infancy, to know himself rather tolerated than loved, by his austere uncle, the unfortunate boy, young as he was, felt all the

importance of his loss. In his cares and sorrows, that weak but affectionate father had been his refuge—in his pastimes, his tutor and his playmate—and as he followed him to the family vault, where he was laid to rest with the pomp and pageantry deemed necessary by Sir Jasper to the dignity of the name he bore, the desolate orphan was at once aware that all the love of which he had hitherto been the object throughout the whole of his brief existence, was buried in the grave with his last parent.

It was a frightful moment, and a painful conviction for the boy; it robbed his mind of its freshness, and his heart of its youth. Once he glanced up into the face of his dreaded uncle, but his eye suddenly fell, as, in the stern countenance which was half averted from him, he read neither sympathy nor grief. Sir Jasper looked, indeed, like a man carved in stone; and the imperturbable composure of his features appeared to mock the mourning cloak in which he was enveloped. There was no encouragement in that marble face; and the glance of the orphan returned to fasten, with even more avidity than before, upon the coffin beside him.

On his way to the church, even the presence of his stern relative had failed to moderate his grief, and he had wept, as the young ever weep, with all the violence of despair; but, as the remains of his fond father were lowered out of his sight, a change came over his spirit which was destined to influence his character through life. When he turned to leave the spot where all his affections lay buried, and resumed his place beside Sir Jasper in the mourning coach, his eyes were as dry as though they had never known a tear, and a deep colour was burning on his cheeks. A word of kindness, the merest approach to a caress, might have melted the rising bitterness, and crushed the demon that was tugging at his heart; but these were not vouchsafed. The baronet sat coldly and magnificently silent; and the homeward drive was performed without the interchange of a single sentence.

When they reached the Hall, its master alighted, and immediately shut himself in his study; while the bereaved boy, totally overlooked even by the menials about him, in

his turn retreated to his solitary room, there to brood alike over the past, the present, and, it may even be, the future. He had heard his uncle, by the death-bed of his last parent, pledge himself not to desert the orphan about to be confided to his compassion ; but he remembered with a burning and indignant heart, how tardily and grudgingly that promise had been extorted by the supplications of the dying man. He strove to recall one demonstration of interest or regard towards himself, displayed by his enforced guardian from his childhood to that very hour ; but he strove in vain. The motherless infant, the child of tears, who drew his first sustenance from the breast of a stranger, had failed to awaken one feeling of commiseration or sympathy in the heart of Sir Jasper Trevanion. The baronet had tolerated his brother, not only because his own credit in the eyes of his fellow-men forbade that he should suffer that brother to starve, but also because his very imprudence had never tempted him to tarnish the dignity of his family. His marriage had been an act of reckless folly, almost amounting to madness, in the eyes of the fortunate possessor of twelve thousand a year, but still it had entailed no disgrace upon his name ; and it was at least satisfactory to be able to present a Lady Katherine Trevanion to the neighbouring squirearchy ; a circumstance to which may probably be attributed the fact that, instead of settling a sufficient income upon his less well-proportioned brother, which might have enabled him to choose his own place of residence, and to enjoy the modest comforts of his own home, Sir Jasper insisted that the helpless couple should reside under his roof ; and accompanied the expression of his will by a declaration that, should they decline to do so, no further assistance need be anticipated from himself.

Such were the circumstances under which Mr. Trevanion and his pretty, silly bride, became the inmates of the paternal mansion ; where, as already stated, Sir Jasper had, even after the death of the Lady Katherine, tolerated his brother, partly from duty, and still more, perhaps, from habit ; but the boy had been, from the first moment of his existence, odious to the selfish and cold-hearted baronet. In the first place, his birth had caused the death of his mother, whose lively absurdities, and buoyant spirits, had served to enliven

the previous stately dulness of the old hall; while, super-added to this privation (for the presence and companionship of the lively lady had become necessary to the comfort of the saturnine man), a lurking jealousy nestled at his heart. He—the representative of his family—was childless; while his brother—his penniless and dependent brother, to whom his will was law, and his protection existence—had given an heir to the house of which he was himself the head; while he had not even yet encountered a woman worthy, in his opinion, to share his fortunes.

And thus the boy had grown up beside him, unloved; an object of aversion and avoidance.

And the lad knew and felt this, although he was unable to fathom its cause. He remembered that he had never been addressed by his uncle, save in reproof; that his childish caresses had been repulsed, and his boyish errors visited with merciless chastisement; and bitterly did he writhe beneath the consciousness that he was now hopelessly dependent upon one whom he both disliked and feared.

“What will become of me?” groaned the unhappy orphan, as he paced, alone and unheeded, the floor of his little chamber. “Why could I not have died with my father? Who, in this wide desolate world, cares for me now?”

Well might he ask himself the dreary question.

It was late in the evening before any one appeared to have remembered his existence; and then he was summoned by a servant to the housekeeper’s room, in which he was accustomed to take his repasts; but his heart was too full; he required no food; and he said so quietly and briefly.

“Nonsense, Master Hubert,” was the retort of the messenger; “be a man, and make up your mind to what can’t be mended. Fasting won’t bring back the dead.”

“I know it,” said the boy, “nor tears; and therefore I have ceased to shed them.”

“That is reasonable at all events,” replied the man; “so come down at once, if you don’t wish to catch a scolding from Mrs. Pearson, for making her wait.”

“She need not wait,” said Hubert; “I require nothing more to-night.”

And he no sooner found himself once more alone, than he flung himself upon his bed, and resumed his musings.

For an entire month the orphan never once met his uncle; nor, in so far as he could ascertain from the attendants, had Sir Jasper even pronounced his name, or alluded to his existence. He was no longer directed to meet the curate, who had hitherto officiated as his tutor, in the breakfast-room, when it was vacated by his uncle; no longer occupied by daily task-work; but was left at perfect liberty to spend day after day according to his own caprice. And that caprice was a strange one in so young a boy; for, shunning the bright sunshine, and the wholesome avocations of his age, his hours were passed either in the dark recesses of the dense wood which formed the western boundary of the Trevanion property, or in the gothic picture-gallery, among the grim portraits of his ancestors.

One by one he paused before them, and gazed upon each, as intently as though the happiness of his future life depended upon his accurate knowledge of every separate feature; but, more than all, he studied the female portraits—from the stiff and stately dame of far-off centuries to the courtly and sylphic figure of his own mother. While thus engaged, the brow of the silent boy would occasionally flush, and his eye kindle, as he remembered that he, too, was a Trevanion; but the paroxysm of excitement never lasted long, and he soon sank back into his habitual gloom.

Thus had the month gone by; and, in that brief interval, the orphan, abandoned thus absolutely to himself, had ceased to pine either for sympathy or companionship. He came and went like one obeying the impulse of a dream; joyless, tearless, and alone. But he was to be no longer permitted to indulge in this negative happiness; for at the termination of the period named, he was suddenly summoned to the presence of his uncle, and he obeyed the command without the quickening of a single pulse. What had he to fear, or to lose?

“Come in, sir, and close the door behind you,” was the greeting he received; and he had no sooner obeyed the order, than the baronet pursued in a stern tone, “You are now of an age to understand that you cannot spend your life

in idleness, wandering like a poacher about the woods ; or dawdling, like a gaping girl, through the galleries of the Hall. Moreover, your presence here must ere long be importunate, as you will one day comprehend. I supported your father in his uselessness, because he was my brother ; but you have no such claim on my forbearance. Nevertheless, as I made to him a promise that I would not abandon you, I have no intention to falsify my word ; and I have accordingly sent for you to state that you will, three days hence, be accompanied by one of my servants to the North, where you will remain four years in a school which I have selected, in order to complete your education. At the termination of that period, you will be—or ought to be—competent to uphold with credit to yourself the honour of the name you bear—an honour, young sir, which saved your father from beggary—either in the army or navy ; and I give you your choice of either profession.”

“I object to both,” was the sturdy reply.

“You object !” echoed the baronet, startled into something like emotion by so unlooked-for a rejoinder ; “*you*—a boy of barely twelve years of age—tell me that you shall oppose my pleasure ! I say, Hubert Trevanion, that I will be obeyed.”

The lad remained silent.

“You do well, sir,” pursued the angry voice, “not to repeat your rebellion. But enough of this. You have heard my decision, and it is immutable. Go and make your preparations, whatever they may be ; our interview is at an end.”

The orphan needed no second bidding ; with a silent bow he left the room ; but as he slowly traversed the gallery which led from his uncle’s apartments, his clenched hands and heaving chest proclaimed the tempest within. His boyhood was now wholly swept away ; the elasticity of his spirit was crushed ; he had begun his wrestle with the realities of the world ; and a dark, hard feeling, to which his tender age ought to have been a stranger, was working within him.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE school to which Hubert Trevanion was conducted by his uncle's serving-man was by no means calculated to inspire any regret on the boy's part, at his abrupt exodus from his inhospitable home; nor had Sir Jasper neglected to provide him with a wardrobe suitable to his station in life. There had been no leave-taking, it is true, between him and his nephew, but this omission was grateful to the orphan, who had few thanks and less affection to offer to his repelling kinsman; and yet, as he saw his conductor depart, on his return to the Hall, his heart sank within him, at the conviction that he stood alone among strangers, with whom he had neither feeling nor sympathy in common. He was, however, soon aroused from the sombre reverie into which he had fallen, by the voice of Dr. Birchmore, the principal of the establishment, by whom he was led into the refectory, where his future companions were assembled at supper, and where his own place was assigned to him.

The personal beauty of the boy had interested the feelings of the worthy doctor, who was, moreover, not insensible to the credit which his academy would derive from numbering among his pupils the nephew and ward of one of the oldest baronets in England; and it was accordingly with the greatest gentleness and indulgence that he commenced his investigation of the progress of his previous studies. The result was far from satisfactory, a long time having elapsed since the lad had opened a book; but, despite the disappointment which this circumstance induced in the breast of the astonished pedagogue, he was encouraged by the evident intelligence of his young pupil, and his voluntary assurance that no application should be wanting on his own part to retrieve the lost time.

Nor was it; for Hubert Trevanion had at least arrived at

the valuable knowledge that, without education, he could never achieve the independence for which he yearned; and ere long his assiduity and talent became the proverb of the school. Still, he was not popular, as his silent and somewhat sullen habits disgusted his playmates; nor was it until he had excited a host of enemies, and fought his way manfully through the school, reckless alike of the age or strength of his opponents, that he succeeded in enforcing the respect of those to whom he had refused alike companionship and regard. This accomplished, he was allowed to indulge his own tastes and pursuits in peace; "the baronet," as he was sneeringly designated by the little community, ceasing by degrees to excite either curiosity or anger; and while peals of laughter and shouts of merriment resounded from the playground, he strolled alone and unheeded under the trees by which it was bounded, or flung himself down in some shady nook to study and reflect at ease.

Thus he made no friends, nor did he need them; and for all companionship he sought only the society of the ushers, three of whom being foreigners, he rapidly acquired the modern languages, and a certain acquaintance with the habits and feelings of other countries. And so the four years wore on. As during the vacations he was the only pupil left at the establishment, the portly doctor and his precise but kind-hearted wife, in their turn, abandoned the classic shade of their academic home, in order to visit their respective families; and Hubert Trevanion was, to his infinite gratification, consigned to the sole guardianship of the German master, who, being as friendless as himself, had known no other home than that of Dr. Birchmore for many long and laborious years.

Simple and sincere, Herr Hauffman was as very a child in heart as the youngest of his class; but he was, nevertheless, a man of deep and varied information, and possessed of considerable skill in imparting the knowledge he had acquired. No companion could, therefore, have been more acceptable to the self-centred and eager Hubert, who, while his more fortunate comrades were revelling in the delights

of family ties and paternal indulgence, was storing his mind hour by hour, and feeling his intellect expand almost without an effort.

How brief appeared to him those weeks of tranquil and undisturbed existence ! and how heartily did he sympathise in the regrets expressed by his fellow pupils on their return to their old toils, and their old duties ; for then, once more, he too was compelled to resume the monotonous routine of the classes, and to spend hours poring over the more abstruse branches of education for which he had no taste, and in which he felt no interest. The mind of the boy had already foreshadowed the future career of the man ; and, while he grasped at every species of knowledge which might tend to his advancement in society, he gave but reluctant attention to that which could only be profitable in the closet.

Thus, when he at length terminated his scholastic career, Hubert Trevanion was declared to be the most accomplished linguist and the best mathematician who had ever quitted the establishment.

On his arrival at the Hall, the orphan at once discovered the motive which had impelled his uncle to declare that his residence there had ceased to be desirable ; when, as he crossed the threshold of the drawing-room, he saw a lady seated in the deep bay of the western window, busily engaged at a tapestry-frame, while three spaniels were lying upon their several cushions near her chair ; who no sooner, however, became aware of his presence than they rushed upon him open-mouthed, as if to resent his intrusion.

“ For shame, Flora ; be quiet, Dash ; come here instantly, Fido,” expostulated their mistress, as the tall, handsome lad calmly made his way towards her, regardless of the uproar ; “ I am really ashamed of you ! Do not be afraid, Mr. Hubert ; the dear pets never bite, it is merely noise.”

“ I am by no means alarmed, madam,” was the quiet reply, “ and am sorry that I have been the innocent cause of creating such a disturbance, by intruding myself upon you so abruptly ; but I was informed that I should find Sir Jasper Trevanion in this apartment.”

“ Sir Jasper,” rejoined the lady, without rising from her seat, “ is, I believe, in the library.—Flora, leave those

wools alone ; you will choke yourself, darling.—Do you particularly wish to see Sir Jasper, Mr. Hubert ?—or can I communicate to him what you desire to say ?”

“As you please, madam,” said the orphan, bitterly ; “I merely intended to inform him that, according to his orders, I have returned to Trevanion Hall.”

“In that case, he need not be disturbed, as that is a matter of course. You will, I believe, find your old room prepared for you ; at least, I gave orders to that effect to my housekeeper.”

“I am obliged to you, madam, and shall at once avail myself of your attention.”

“But, before you leave me, Mr. Hubert, it will be as well to mention that henceforth, whatever you may require, you must apply to myself. I have undertaken to relieve Sir Jasper from all unnecessary trouble and exertion ; and it will therefore be quite useless to make any appeal to him.”

“I have no inclination to do so, madam.”

“You are right, for it would be of no avail ; and now that we understand each other, I will not detain you longer.” A cold bend of the head, and a glance towards the door of the apartment, followed her words ; and amid another storm of yelping and barking, Hubert withdrew from the presence of his new aunt.

A marvellous change had indeed come over the old Hall. The man of marble had become plastic as wax beneath the firm and determined will of a stronger mind than his own. The arrogant head was bowed ; the haughty spirit lowered.

Within six months of his brother's death, Sir Jasper Trevanion had married the wealthy widow of an Indian Nabob, who had returned to England, with a colossal fortune, and an exhausted constitution, only to die and make way for his successor. Lady Trevanion had been a beauty, and was still a fine woman ; but the long habit of command had rendered her imperious, self-willed, and despotic ; while the consciousness of her enormous wealth had induced her with an arrogance which would have sat ungracefully even upon a duchess, and which the remembrance of her obscure origin (for the well-dowered bride of the high-born Sir

Jasper could not trace back her lineage beyond the last generation) had altogether failed to diminish. The cold and haughty representative of the Trevanions had been dazzled by her magnificence, and captivated by her person ; while the lady herself, with that yearning for a title which is one of the most patent weaknesses of a vulgar mind, after some hesitation had consented to bestow herself and her rupees upon the man whose greatest pride had hitherto centred in the antiquity of his race.

Pompous was the display made at the marriage. The county journals had appropriated whole columns to the details of the magnificent rejoicings consequent upon the event. All the county had left cards at the Hall ; and all the gossips had been busy with the diamonds and cashmeres of the bride ; but it was not long ere the baronet himself discovered that the rod by which he was henceforth to be ruled, however thickly gilded, was not the less a rod of iron. The man of marble had found a mate of steel ; the contest was an unequal one ; for while the nature of the husband was too haughty for contention, that of the wife was too overbearing for concession ; and thus, by the time that the happy couple were thoroughly established under their own roof, the question of supremacy was decided ; and Lady Trevanion, whose accumulated thousands remained under her exclusive control, reigned undisputed mistress of the establishment.

All these circumstances were soon made known to Hubert by the indignant Mrs. Pearson ; who, accustomed for half a lifetime to the lofty carelessness of her aristocratic master, and the negative rule of the trifling Lady Katherine (whom, in imitation of Sir Jasper, she revered for her high birth), could ill brook the uncompromising sway of the new mistress of the mansion ; " A nobody," as she emphatically declared, " whose name would never have been seen in print had she not cast her spell over the proudest race in the land. However, Master Hubert," she continued, exultingly, " it is only for a time, and you must have patience ; you will be Sir Hubert Trevanion yet, as all the old servants hope and desire. *You* have good blood in you on both sides ; and what should be, will be. Your uncle, poor dear man !

married for a heir—he had better have contented himself with the one that Providence had already provided for him—and you see what has come of it. Here is my lady, three years a wife, and not yet a mother; nor ever likely to be, it's my notion. There's no end to her money, they say; but it's little good it is to us while Sir Jasper has not the handling of it. However, as I have heard that she has no relations that she cares to own, because she doesn't dare to introduce them to her new connections, it may one day be yours, and you may be a great man yet."

"Without her help, I trust, my good Pearson," replied the boy, as the blood mantled over his brow.

"With all my heart: without her help, till she sees and feels that you do not need it, and then it will be given less grudgingly; but until that day comes, it is weary work here, Master Hubert. The only comfort we have now, Tomkins the butler, and I, and Sir Jasper's man, is to talk over old times; and often and often do we remember the days when we let you wander about, sad and lonely, and wished you away, that the sight of you mightn't anger and worry our poor master, little thinking what was to come next! But that's all over now; and it's you we look to when we hope for better times. You haven't been to the picture-gallery yet? Well, don't go; for there you'll find my lady, full length, covered with precious stones, and with all her horrid dogs about her, hanging side by side with your own dear mother, who *was* a lady, and had always a kind word and a merry smile for every one about her. Don't go, Master Hubert; it will make your heart ache."

"I will not," said the lad, bitterly.

"You're not here for long, I take it," pursued the garrulous old woman, "for my lady can't abide your name, and wanted Sir Jasper to send you straight off to sea from school."

"I am not going to sea," said the youth, resolutely.

"Not going to sea! Why, there's a vessel bound for the Indies all ready to take you on board; my lady has made up her mind."

"And so have I," was the calm rejoinder.

"Then mercy deliver us!" exclaimed his companion;

"for we shall have such a storm in the old Hall as it has not seen for many a day. But I'm glad to hear you say so, for all that. I hate such kidnapping work. Sending you to sea, in the hope that you'll be drowned, or shipwrecked, or cast ashore, or something of that sort, and never heard of again; and all because she's jealous of you."

"She has little cause to be so," said the orphan, sadly.

"I don't know that, Mr. Hubert," replied the housekeeper, significantly. "It ain't so pleasant, after all, for a woman of that stamp, who has nothing to be proud of but her gold, to see a fine young fellow like you ready to tear the lining out of her money-bags; and she without chick or child of her own to stop you. No, no; it can't be pleasant, and that's the truth of it; for, as sure as my name's Margaret, many and many's the prayer that her proud ladyship has put up to have a young baronet of her own; but no one prayed with her, I've a notion; not even Sir Jasper himself, who, poor dear man, has had enough of her race already, if I don't mistake. Once on a time, full two years back, she had a notion of some such thing, and a pretty fuss there was at the Hall, I can tell you; but it came to nothing, as might have been expected. A young baronet, indeed! Just as if baronets were made of such stuff as that!"

And Mrs. Pearson curled her lip, as though the very idea of such a catastrophe was too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment.

"And my uncle—Sir Jasper?" said the boy. "How comes it that his proud spirit submits so tamely to her despotism?"

"Aye, there it is," responded the old lady, "that's what puzzles us all—man, woman, and child. You know, Master Hubert, that there wasn't a prouder nor a sterner man than Sir Jasper for miles round. At home or abroad, he was always the same; caring neither for lords nor squires; but bearing himself, as he had every right to do, as the head of one of the ancientest families in England—and now look at him! Never does he venture to say 'aye,' when my lady sees fit to say 'nay;' and there he sits for hours shut up alone in his library, doing of nothing—she takes good

care of that—but poring over a parcel of mouldy old books that had been quiet enough upon the shelves for years, while she overlooks the steward's accounts, and arranges the house expenses, and receives the rents—aye, and raises them too whenever she is so minded, as though she had been a born Trevanion, a lady in her own right, and had married a beggar who hadn't a word to say in anything."

"My uncle must be strangely changed," observed Hubert, moodily.

"Right enough, my dear boy; he is strangely changed—body and mind too. And oh, Master Hubert," continued the faithful old servant, as large tears swelled in her eyes, "we sometimes fear—Mr. Tomkins and I—that the poor dear gentleman may not be able to hold out against it; and should he go, what would become of the old Hall, and of all of us?"

"You would have me for a master," said the lad, with a kindling eye.

"Aye, but the widow—the widow would be left, you know; and she would keep you out of your own while she could."

The boy smiled scornfully.

"At all events she would take care of her money," persisted the housekeeper; "you would see none of that. There are other husbands to be bought besides Sir Jasper—and then he will have suffered all this for nothing."

"He has, in any case, no one to blame but himself," was the sententious reply.

"That's true enough, too, Master Hubert," said his companion; "but our mistakes are none the more easy to bear because we find them out too late. What's done, can't be undone; and here we are, the laughing-stock of all the county, for what I know to the contrary—my honoured master and all.

"Is it intended, do you know, Mrs. Pearson, that I should see Sir Jasper during my stay?"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no," replied the old dame, oracularly; "all will depend upon how my lady takes to you; and you will have hard cards to play, I can tell you."

"I shall play none."

"Well, Master Hubert, we shall see. Them that live longest, see most; but you must not forget that all will depend upon her ladyship."

"*I* never shall."

"Why bless the lad, what can you do of yourself? You are but a young thing yet, and have no one to look to but her."

"I am at least old enough," said Hubert, with a touch of his uncle's haughtiness, "to revolt against tyranny. I would not submit to it from my father's brother; I shall assuredly defy it in the person of my uncle's wife."

"It will be of no use," sighed Mrs. Pearson; "Sir Jasper tried it, you may be sure, and you see how the struggle ended. Take an old woman's advice, Master Hubert; keep well with my lady; don't contradict her, but let her have everything her own way; it will only be for a time."

"I thank you for your good-will, my old friend," said the orphan; "but I will make no such promise. Ha! there goes the dressing-bell; and now I shall soon be made aware whether I am to be honoured with a seat at my uncle's table, or consigned once more to your kindness."

CHAPTER III.

A DEPARTURE.

STRANGE, and even affecting, was the meeting between the uncle and nephew in the spacious and lordly dining-room of the old Hall, as, having received no warning to the contrary, Hubert Trevanion calmly passed the threshold, and advanced to greet its master. Cold indeed was Sir Jasper still, but he was no longer stern; and the stripling detected in his eye a yearning which he had never before seen there, as, for the first time, their hands met; but nevertheless no word of tenderness accompanied the look which lingered on his countenance for a moment, and then melted away; he

asked no question—he betrayed no interest in his young relative ; but languidly resumed his seat, as though he had done all that could be required of him, and eschewed further responsibility.

Lady Trevanion, in all the splendour of a *parvenue*, had already taken the head of her table, whence she glanced at her unwelcome guest with a haughty eye and a lowering brow, as though she already recognised in the calm self-dependent youth, a formidable antagonist ; and thus the meal commenced in comfortless and threatening silence. The servants moved noiselessly over the costly carpet, and performed their duties with the quiet vigilance of well-tutored automatons ; the successive courses were served and disappeared—and Hubert remarked that, while his uncle ate sparingly and in silence, the lady of the mansion partook largely of the luxuries before her, although constantly evincing displeasure, and affecting to cavil at their quality. At length, the cheerless repast came to a close ; the dessert was placed upon the table, and the servants withdrew, evidently to the discomfort of Sir Jasper, who, although still silent, betrayed a fidgetiness wholly at variance with the calm self-centred manner for which he had formerly been so conspicuous ; while Hubert, who had nerved himself for every contingency, remained impassive, coldly awaiting the pleasure of his companions.

As he had anticipated, it was the lady who took the initiative. “ I presume, Mr. Hubert Trevanion,” she said, superciliously, as she carefully arranged an emerald bracelet by which her left arm was encircled, “ that you do not anticipate a long sojourn under the roof of your uncle.”

“ I leave its term in my uncle’s hands, madam.”

Lady Trevanion smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile ; it said, as plainly as any words could have done, that Sir Jasper was no longer omnipotent in his own house : “ Down, Fido ! Have I not yet taught you that I will be obeyed ? For shame, to set so bad an example.—You do right, young sir”—she was now speaking to her husband’s nephew—“ to disclaim any will of your own in such a case, as it saves trouble to all parties, Sir Jasper having made up his mind upon the subject. You have already been a great expense

to him—a very great expense ; and although, so long as he remained a bachelor, he was, of course, at liberty to dispose of his property as he saw fit, he has now other duties to perform, and he is prepared to act accordingly. Not,” pursued her ladyship, with ill-bred eagerness, “that his marriage with me has impoverished him—far from it—very far from it—but he, like myself, is weary of dependants. He bore with your father as a duty, and with your mother as your father’s wife ; and with you while you were still a child ; all very right and commendable, no doubt—I do not mean to reproach him. I would have done as much for my own relations, had they required it.”

“It was fortunate alike for them and for yourself, that you had none, madam,” was the composed reply of the lad, as he remembered the tale so lately told to him by his humble friend in the housekeeper’s room.

The lady flushed crimson. The first stone had been flung, and had hit its mark : but, like an able general, she scorned to acknowledge, or even to recognise the check, and, with a still more bitter smile, she continued :

“Your father, Mr. Hubert Trevanion, was, as I have heard, a mere inane and indolent man of fashion, and your mother the penniless daughter of a peer—poverty wedded to helplessness ; but that was not your fault, my poor boy ; and be assured that neither Sir Jasper nor I mean to upbraid you with it.”

“I can believe so, madam,” said the orphan, calmly meeting the hard eye which was fastened upon him ; “and even had it been otherwise, I should have felt no shame in hearing myself rebuked on such a subject. Dependent as I may be, for the moment, I can proudly trace my descent for centuries on both sides ; and feel richer in my apparent poverty with such a consciousness, than had I been born to inherit thousands, bequeathed to me by accident, and of which I should feel ashamed to trace the source.”

“Sir Jasper Trevanion, am I to be insulted in my own house by a stripling ?” demanded the lady, vehemently.

“Hubert, you forget yourself”—gasped out the baronet.

“In what way, sir ?” asked the lad, coldly ; “I have but given utterance to feelings which you cannot do otherwise

than respect. You, the descendant of a long line of ancestors will surely understand my reverence for high birth, and sympathise in my contempt for wealth which has no illustration less plebeian than its own vileness."

"Sir Jasper," exclaimed his wife, passionately, "this boy shall not remain another hour under my roof. Hark ye, young sir, I nurse no vipers in my bosom. You know best by whom you have been tutored; and were it not that you bear your uncle's name, I would cast you off, to learn the worship which the world will pay to your high birth and proud descent without a penny to enforce your claim. As it is——"

"I ask nothing of *you*, madam," said Hubert, as he rose from his seat; "I do not recognise either your power or your authority. I am the son of your husband's brother—the last of the race of Trevanion; and should its present representative see fit to deny me his protection and support, I must abide by his decision; but I acknowledge no will save his—I will abide by no decision save his own."

"Do you dare to brave me, Hubert Trevanion?"

"I have no such desire, madam. I simply question your right to decide my destiny."

"You are wrong, Hubert—very wrong," interposed the baronet, evidently quailing beneath the anger of his wife; "you owe alike obedience and respect to Lady Trevanion."

"I am ever ready to render both, sir, where they are due," said the orphan, with deep emotion; "but I appeal to yourself whether I have been met by her ladyship in a manner to induce either? She, probably, thinks merely of my age, and regards me as a child bound only to do her bidding; but she can know little of my boyhood when she so argues; and you, Sir Jasper—you who received me from the hands of an indulgent and dying father—you, at least, may convince her of her mistake. From the hour in which I lost my last parent I ceased to be a child, and grew, not so much by time as by trial. I had no youth, but sprang at once from the boy into the man. There were no home affections, no heart yearnings, to fling back my feelings upon others; I was alone—coldly, cheerlessly, frightfully alone—left to combat with my own passions, and failings, and ne-

cessities—given over to the purchased care of strangers—abandoned to the narrow sympathies of hired teachers and uncongenial associates. You, at least, can utter no reproach, for I am but what you yourself have made me.”

“And this, then,” exclaimed the lady, with a reproachful glance at her husband; “this is the boy of sixteen who was to bow to my will, and to know no pleasure but my own. Upon my word, Sir Jasper, I must compliment you upon your discrimination, and upon the admirable method in which you have reared your brother’s son.”

“We have been separated for four years,” said the baronet, deprecatingly.

“And will do well to separate once more for a longer period,” observed Lady Trevanion, as she rose in her turn; “at all events, Sir Jasper, you have only to choose between your nephew and your wife; for this young gentleman shall assuredly not remain under the same roof as myself.”

“You know, my dear, that the vessel will sail within a fortnight,” urged the master of the house.

“Until which period, Mr. Hubert must be accommodated with a home elsewhere,” was the haughty rejoinder.

“Pardon me, sir,” interposed the youth, firmly; “but, if I just now understood your meaning, you have it in contemplation to send me out of the country?”

“You are provided for,” said the baronet, nervously; “Lady Trevanion has procured for you a midshipman’s berth on board an Indiaman which is shortly to sail; and has also had the kindness to interest in your favour some of her very influential connections in that country.”

“Her ladyship does me honour,” replied Hubert, bowing profoundly; “but I have no intention to embrace such a career, and no inclination to enter life under such auspices.”

“Better and better!” sneered the irate lady; “and you will, perhaps, be so obliging as to inform Sir Jasper and myself of the precise nature of your future projects.”

“Willingly, madam; I had already expressed my utter aversion to both services, and stated this distinctly to Sir Jasper, years ago—nor have I seen any cause to alter my decision. That I should not have the alternative of the learned professions, the nature of my education sufficiently

evinced ; and I have consequently left no effort untried, to fit myself for the only honourable career which was left open to me."

"And pray what may that be?"

"Commerce, madam. I aspire to the respected name of an upright English merchant."

"Trade, sir!" exclaimed the baronet, thoroughly aroused from his apathy ; "am I to understand that you would degrade the presumptive heir of the Trevanions into a trader?"

"Such is, in fact, my purpose."

"You are a disgrace to your name, young man," said the lady, loftily.

"I regret, madam, that you should be involved in that disgrace," was the reply.

"I will not give you a shilling if you persist in such degradation," gasped the baronet.

"I ask nothing," said the lad, although his heart quailed for a moment ; "I am informed by a letter which was placed in my hands by my father on his death-bed, that I inherit certain jewels once belonging to my mother ; and I will owe my existence to her bequest. I know not that I could apply it to a more pious purpose."

"They shall be delivered to you," said Sir Jasper, coldly.

"A diamond mine, no doubt!" sneered Lady Trevanion, as she glanced at herself in a mirror ; "one, however, which will be little missed, and may well be spared. I presume, Sir Jasper, that the young gentleman may at once take possession of his inheritance, and leave the Hall?"

"One moment"—faltered the baronet ; "only one moment. You are mad, Hubert, thus to brave your family. Remember that you have no other home."

"Home, sir!" echoed the stripling. "I have never known a home—I can never hope for one, until I have earned it ; and until I have done so, I must be content to find a resting-place among strangers."

"You talk like a child. Without means you cannot make your way—and though revolted by your disobedience, I will not turn you adrift upon the world to starve. You do not even know in what direction to bend your steps."

"Pardon me, sir; I shall proceed immediately to London, where I shall dispose of my poor mother's jewels; and thence I shall at once make my way to Germany."

"And why to Germany?"

"Because I am assured of a welcome in the family of a firm, though humble friend, to whom I owe much more than I can ever repay; and, even should I fail to realise the hope which has been held out to me of a successful career in that country, the blessing of a welcome under any roof will amply repay me for subsequent disappointment."

"May I venture to inquire the name of this valuable friend?" again demanded the baronet.

"Certainly. It is Herr Hauffman, the German professor at Dr. Birchmore's."

"An usher!" interposed Lady Trevanion, with a bitter laugh.

"Even so, madam, if you prefer the term. An humble usher, who has long been to me a brother and a friend. A man who has coined his mind into wages, and nerved his heart to receive thankfully the salary won by his talents. I am proud of the regard which he has bestowed on me."

"You are lost, Hubert Trevanion!" groaned Sir Jasper. "It should have sufficed, young man, that you were born under this roof, to have preserved you from such grovelling companionships as these."

"Grovelling, indeed!" echoed the lady, sarcastically; "and now, Sir Jasper, have you heard enough? or are we to pass the evening in listening to the revelations of your hopeful nephew? Surely there need be no more waste of words upon the subject. The young man has formed connections for himself more desirable in his eyes than those which he rejects; and I see no reason why you should not leave him at liberty to cultivate them."

"You forget, Lady Trevanion, that he is the last of his race."

"I forget nothing, sir," was the sharp reply; "except that I have been insulted in your presence by one of your own blood, and that you have not deigned to chastise the offender."

"His only fitting punishment will be immediate exile from the home of his ancestors," said Sir Jasper; but his lip quivered as the childless man suddenly remembered that he was, in order to conciliate his offended wife, about to banish, probably for ever, not only his brother's son, but, what to his selfish nature was infinitely more sacred, his own presumptive heir and successor. What might be the fate of the lad, thus cast forth into a cold and heartless world by his natural protectors! Struggle and hardship, contumely, and—it might even be—shame and death!

A clammy dew started to the brow of the baronet, and his head sank upon his breast, as his glance passed rapidly from the placid and proud countenance of the silent strippling, whose sense of wrong was too powerful to relieve itself by any outward emotion, to the exulting face of his inexorable wife, who with her tall figure rigidly erect, and her dark cheek flushed with passion, seemed to await the termination of the scene without one misgiving of its result.

No further opposition, as she at once felt, need be dreaded from Sir Jasper upon any point, when she had secured this victory over his young kinsman; and thenceforward the desolate man would be totally dependent upon herself for sympathy and companionship.

The same idea had, however, flashed dark and threatening on the mind of the baronet. Should Hubert, indignant at his desertion, refuse all further communication with his family, the ancient race would become extinct, and the name of Trevanion fall into oblivion. Sir Jasper felt that he must temporise with the youth, even at the risk of exciting the wrath of his wife; and, acting upon this conviction, he turned resolutely towards him, and crushing down alike his haughtiness and the vague terror which had grown upon him, he said sternly, "You have heard my decision, sir?"

"I have."

"Henceforth, then, you will possess the control over your own career, which you appear to covet. The world is before you, and you must struggle with it as you can. Do not, however, imagine, that I have so utterly lost sight of my own dignity, as to permit you to go hence without the means of support necessary to uphold, in some degree, the

honour of the name you bear—or, better still, if you will favour me by relinquishing that name until you have ceased to disgrace it—to enable you to give some show of respectability to the one which you may see fit to assume.”

“I have no intention to resign the name of my father, Sir Jasper Trevanion.”

“Perhaps if I propose to you, in the event of this concession, to increase the provision I have offered, you may be induced to change your mind.”

“By no means; for while conscious that I am not in a position to reject your offer, I beg you distinctly to understand that I accept it as the son of Aubrey Trevanion, and not as your nephew.”

“Then, sir, you shall be authorised to draw upon my banker for two hundred pounds annually, on condition that you inform him of your place of residence.”

“I admit no conditions.”

“Do not insist, Sir Jasper,” interposed Lady Trevanion; “if you are indeed prepared to commit so great a weakness as to reward this estimable young man for his disobedience, be it so; but pray do not descend to ask as a favour what you have every authority to enforce as a right.”

“Then our confidence is ended,” murmured the baronet. “My steward shall communicate to you the address of my banker in town, Mr. Trevanion; and you are at liberty to leave my house at any moment when you may find it convenient.”

“I would beg to suggest an early one,” said the lady, as with a lofty bow she swept from the apartment.

The uncle and the nephew were alone; only a few paces separated them; and for an instant they stood gazing earnestly at each other. The heavy breathing of the agitated baronet was audible amid the silence, and Hubert almost pitied him, as he witnessed the violence of the struggle which shook his frame. For the first time his heart yearned towards the weak and spirit-bowed man, whom he remembered so stern of purpose, and so haughty of demeanour; but it was only for an instant; for, ere long, resentment swallowed up compassion; and contempt usurped the place of pity.

"Have you any further commands for me, Sir Jasper?" he asked, as he prepared to leave the room.

"None, sir, none. All is over between us."

And, with a cold and distant salutation, the uncle and nephew parted for ever, as both believed, in this world.

CHAPTER IV

HUSBAND AND FATHER.

ALL was indeed over! And Hubert Trevanion, in his sixteenth year, stood alone in a world where the battle is too often to the strong, and the race to the swift. It is scarcely wonderful that after his uncle had left him, he should gaze around upon the once familiar features of his childhood's home with a strange sinking of the heart. The last hour had decided his destiny; he had returned to the halls of his ancestors only for one brief day, and he was once more about to abandon them for ever. But he soon subdued the emotion which this consciousness had called up; for, from what was he, in fact, about to separate himself? From the mere inanimate objects which could be dear only from association, and which would remain unchanged whatever might be the vicissitudes of his own fortune. No tear would fall for him—no heart regret him—no wholesome human sympathy be awakened either by his struggles or his success; he was an alien from the home of his fathers, and he must go forth to seek another, and forget what might have been, in what was.

And thus he *did* go forth, after a warm leave-taking with the old servants, who wept when they wrung his hand, and could not control their sorrow as they saw that his own eyes were tearless.

"It is not because you do not feel, I know that," sobbed the soft-hearted Mrs. Pearson; "I don't like the wild, strange light in your eyes; and I would sooner a thousand

times see you cry like a child than seem so cold and placid. It isn't natural, Master Hubert."

"Nothing is natural under this roof, my good old friend," replied the youth, with a ghastly smile; "neither my uncle's supineness, nor his wife's tyranny, nor my own exile—nothing is natural, save, indeed, the kind hearts which are now throbbing about me. But I see that the chaise is ready, and I shall scarcely reach the post-town in time for the mail; so now, and perhaps for ever, farewell! I need not ask you to remember me, for I feel sure that you will do so." And once more grasping the hands of the excited domestics, Hubert turned away; after having, with a mockery of courteousness born of the bitterness of his spirit, deposited his leave-taking cards upon the hall-table; and springing into the hired vehicle which awaited him, he drove rapidly from the splendid mansion which was no longer to be his home.

In accordance with the resolution that he had expressed to his uncle, the young adventurer at once proceeded to Germany, where he ultimately succeeded in obtaining a situation in a substantial house of business, through the good offices of the family of Herr Hauffman. Years passed on; and the knowledge which he had acquired of the different European languages served him well with his employers, by whom he was gradually entrusted with the whole of their foreign correspondence; and to whom his services ultimately became so indispensable that he was received into the firm, and became the head of their London establishment. Here, as may have been already gathered from the conversation which our tale commences, he had contracted a marriage with the daughter and heiress of a wealthy merchant; not without a certain repugnance consequent upon that pride of birth which he had never ceased to feel, but without hesitation, as the most rapid means of securing the independence which he had sworn to achieve.

Mrs. Trevanion was a weak, half-educated, *quasi*-fine lady, who had passed her life between the fashionable establishment where she had received her education, and her father's villa at Richmond. She had early lost her

mother, and was petted and indulged accordingly. Before she had attained her eighteenth year she had exhausted every circulating library within her reach; could paint flowers, work crochet, and 'perform' on the piano. Small in stature, and slight in figure, there were nevertheless a grace and prettiness about her which easily induced a casual observer to forgive the expressionless character of her face, with its abundant screen of pale yellow hair, and its light and prominent blue eyes, in favour of an exquisite complexion, and a peculiarly pleasing smile. Hers was, in short, a style of beauty which resembled a clever but incomplete sketch, without sufficient colouring to give it character; and which, place it in whatever light you would, never satisfied the eye, or thoroughly defined itself.

The *morale* of Miss Rotheringbury was in perfect accordance with her *physique*. She had passionate impulses; what spoiled child has not? but she did not possess sufficient strength of purpose to carry out her will. Timid by nature, she was easily overawed; and while she indulged herself freely in tyrannising over those who readily yielded to her pleasure, she was cowed by a look from any individual who was bold enough to oppose her.

Such was the bride whom Hubert Trevanion, without much difficulty, wooed and won. His worldly position and commercial ability were satisfactory to the lady's father; while the lady herself, fascinated by his handsome person (which recalled at once her ideal of half-a-dozen of her favourite novel-heroes), and dazzled by the hope of a someday reconciliation with the stately baronet and his jewel-laden wife, and a possible sojourn in the ancestral home of her high-born lover, with the self-mystification, common to young and unreflecting girls who mistake the captivation of their fancy for a nobler and better feeling, saw only a proper sense of dignity in the unbending coldness of her betrothed husband; and had learnt, long ere he led her, radiant in Brussels lace and orange-blossom, to the altar, to defer to all his wishes, and to bend before his will, as entirely as if thenceforward she was to be a mere puppet in his hands.

And such in truth she proved, after one or two abortive struggles at supremacy which only tended to rivet her chains still closer, by affording to her impassive husband an additional opportunity of enforcing upon her conviction her utter incapacity of self-government. To every appeal he replied by reminding her of her past violence, expatiating upon its extreme ill-breeding, and pointing out to her the necessity, now that she had become the wife of a man of family and station, of some effort on her part to prove herself equal to the position she had attained. For a time the poor girl pouted and grew sullen as she listened to these inferences of her inferiority, and received perpetual warnings to abstain from certain habits and expressions, which, as Mr. Trevanion coolly informed her, were totally incompatible with high-breeding, and could not be tolerated in *his* wife; and at others she wept over herself as she remembered that, until the hour in which she became such, no words of blame had ever reached her ear. She was so miserably alone too; for with the exception of her father and the maiden sister who presided over his establishment, her fastidious lord would admit none of her former associates beneath his roof.

"You are now in a responsible position, Mrs. Trevanion," was his reply, as she endeavoured to expostulate against the exclusion of her two favourite cousins, "and must learn to suffice to yourself."

The struggle was soon over. The total want of moral courage evinced by his wife, while it excited the contempt of Mr. Trevanion, admirably seconded his views; and when the violent grief of his victim at the sudden death of her father, occasioned the premature birth of her expected infant, and stretched her for months upon a bed of sickness, he at once felt that he had no further opposition to apprehend. Enchanted with the lovely little girl, which throve upon the bosom of a stranger while its childish mother was still a helpless invalid, Mrs. Trevanion neither sought nor wished for other companionship. She watched with pleased and puerile curiosity all the details of the nursery; and was never weary of wondering at the astounding fact that she was herself the mother of the rosy smiling little creature

before her—that it was her own—that it already knew her, and loved her, *almost* as much as its nurse; and would stretch forth its little hands towards her, and crow with delight as it looked into her face.

It is true that there had been one drawback even to this innocent and natural felicity; and that one, as we need scarcely say, came from her husband, who, while occupied with the men of law in the settlement of Mr. Rotheringbury's affairs, had been summoned to the bedside of his suffering wife, whence with childish eagerness she directed his attention to her new treasure.

"Ha!" was the cold remark of the gentleman; "so you have given me a daughter, Clara. I anticipated as much. And now, take care of yourself; and you may yet one day make me the father of a boy."

He did, it is true, stoop down and kiss her pale cheek, but he turned no second glance upon the infant; and, in compliance with a hint from the nurse, he immediately afterwards left the sick room.

Ere the recovery of Mrs. Trevanion was complete, her noble fortune had almost wholly passed into the hands of her husband; the villa at Richmond had become her own property; and the weak but well-meaning old aunt by whom she had been brought up had returned to Cumberland, anxious to end her days under the same roof which had witnessed her birth. Her other relations had, as we have already stated, long ceased to find a welcome in the home of Mr. Trevanion, and, in consequence, gradually forbore their visits; and thus the young wife was thrown entirely upon her husband for society.

Under these circumstances, nothing could be more natural than that as her grief for the loss of her father insensibly wore away, her whole happiness centred in her child, whose extreme loveliness soon won for it a deep affection, even in the heart of its greatly disappointed father; while, as years went by without any addition to his family, Mr. Trevanion at length brought himself to believe that the once-despised little girl might one day even better serve his ambition than the son for which he had so fondly hoped.

At the period of the infant's birth, he had been sanguine

in his belief that it would some day bear the title and sustain the honours of his house, and his mortification at its sex was consequently deep and bitter ; but when, a year or two subsequently, he ascertained that Lady Trevanion had, contrary to all expectation, become the mother of a son, his dream vanished ; and he forthwith resolved to rear his daughter in such refinement as should, combined with her extraordinary beauty and noble fortune, render her a fitting bride for the proudest noble in the land.

Thus, as the child emerged from infancy into girlhood, she was placed under the immediate charge of a lady of decayed rank, to whom the luxurious home of the wealthy and high-bred merchant offered a welcome refuge from the cares and privations to which she must otherwise have been exposed ; and surrounded by the most eminent masters, whose services were requited with unbounded liberality, and rendered with equal zeal. No interference was permitted on the part of Mrs. Trevanion, who had long before this period become so passive under the authority of her husband, that she uttered no remonstrance ; and, finally, satisfied by the affection of the loving girl, whose tenderness suffered no abatement even under these unpromising circumstances, she ceased to assert the slightest wish to control or guide her actions.

Lady Mary Brookland was the ruling spirit of the house ; and while Mrs. Trevanion lounged on her sofa engaged upon a novel, or took her solitary drive, the young heiress, accompanied by her high-born mistress, was introduced to the gaieties of London life ; frequented the opera, the parks, and the public gardens ; and, thanks to the able chaperonage of the accomplished woman of fashion, soon became a marked object of attraction in that sphere in which her father was anxious that she should move.

In due course of time the lovely Miss Trevanion was presented at court by her obliging friend Lady Mary, and welcomed to the intimacy of her aristocratic connections. Her great beauty and splendid expectations were sedulously whispered abroad ; her extraordinary accomplishments and refinement of manner were the theme of general admira-

tion; and, before she had attained her twentieth year, more than one highly-descended suitor had become a candidate for her hand.

The exultation of Mr. Trevanion was great, although perfectly undemonstrative; he felt as if, through his daughter, he were resuming his legitimate place in society; and already looked forward to the coronet which was to cincture her brow as the reward of his own humiliation and struggle. As his thoughts occasionally glanced to Sir Jasper and his heir, his lip curled rather with pride than resentment. He should yet teach them that he could win an illustrious position for which he was indebted solely to himself, and which was independent of their influence.

Under such circumstances as these it does not require to be explained that Lady Mary Brookland gradually became all-powerful in the merchant's house. He had, as we have already shown, from the very period of his marriage, discountenanced the associates, as well as the family, of his wife; and as his daughter grew to womanhood they were slowly and almost imperceptibly replaced by those of his aristocratic inmate, who was by no means averse to indulge her high-born but far from affluent nieces and cousins by a participation in the luxuries of her new home. First, it was the Honourable Miss Stapleton, who, at the entreaty of her aunt, consented to pass a month with her interesting charge, and to accompany her to exhibitions and picture galleries, to appear in her opera-box, and to share in her riding excursions; then it was the charming widow of Sir John Snowdon, whose son and heir being at Eton, rendered it peculiarly desirable that his fond and anxious mother should occasionally reside in town for a few weeks, in order to assure herself more satisfactorily of his health and progress than she could possibly do in her Highland castle; and on the occasion of these gratifying visits, flocks of noble ladies availed themselves of the opportunity to welcome them to the metropolis, and to make the acquaintance of the charming Miss Trevanion, who formed so attractive a feature in the fashionable fêtes of the season.

The beautiful Richmond villa soon became immensely

popular with the *beau monde*, who were enchanted with the *dejeûners dansants* and *matinées musicales* provided for their amusement; and who, as they strolled over the velvet lawns and flower-studded conservatories, many of them proud of their own condescension, and others careless of all beyond the passing amusement of the hour, little suspected that they were mere pawns upon the diplomatic chess-board of their host, and were unconsciously working out the one great purpose of his existence.

The unexceptionable breeding of Mr. Trevanion, his ancient descent, and the uncalculating munificence of his establishment, ensured the respect and deference of all by whom he was approached; while his sterling good sense and general information were alike appreciated by the more reflecting portion of his guests. Dowager dames and middle-aged nobles soon learnt to prefer his society to that of the pleasure-hunters who fluttered through his saloons; and his dinner-table in Westbourne Terrace was in due course of time as much and as satisfactorily filled as his Richmond shrubberies.

Early accustomed to submission and supineness, Mrs. Trevanion evinced no mortification at the fact that Lady Mary did the honours of her house, seemingly satisfied that by such an arrangement she was relieved alike from exertion and responsibility; and, as she was always courteous to her guests, amiable, and well-dressed, she was generally considered as a lady-like, quiet little person, somewhat uninteresting, but perfectly presentable, whose destiny was a most enviable one, and for whom the world must evidently be *couleur de rose*.

Nor was the existence of Mrs. Trevanion, in point of fact, by any means an unhappy one: she was proud of her husband even while she feared him; and still more proud of her daughter, whose unfailing affection had been proof against all the temptations to arrogance and heartlessness by which she was surrounded; while she was at the same time dazzled and delighted by the perpetual stream of gaiety and splendour upon which she was borne unresistingly along. She was amused by the eager pursuit of pleasure in which she was too indolent to share, even had she been permitted

to do so; and flattered when her comfortable sofa was shared by a titled dowager or a withered man of fashion.

For years the courtly Lady Mary, who had become strongly attached to her young charge, had earnestly encouraged the ambitious dreams of her host, and watched the patrician admirers by whom the fair girl was approached with a jealousy equal to his own; but, a few months previous to the opening of our tale, she had relaxed wonderfully in her vigilance. Whether it were that she considered Miss Trevanion at six-and-twenty, and, in other respects, her own mistress, equally competent to judge and act for herself in the most important circumstance of her life, or that some other undivulged reason existed for her sudden quiescence, it is at least certain that her lectures upon the subject of eligible marriages, and the expediency of forming desirable connections, altogether ceased; while it was equally apparent that the beautiful heiress, although courteous and affable to all her suitors, evinced no preference towards either. And as the popularity of his daughter increased, so did the worldly dreams of Mr. Trevanion grow more and more brilliant. It was a matter perfectly settled in his mind that she was destined to accomplish a splendid alliance—a conviction which was strengthened by the peculiar disposition and habits of the young lady herself, who, reared in indulgence and luxury, was at once self-relying and refined, and entirely unsuited for an existence of obscurity or struggle.

How many visionary coronets danced before the mental sight of the proud father, poised only by a silken thread above the polished brow of his child, which it required but her touch to snap! With what silent delight did he anticipate the moment when as a peeress she might look down in disdain upon the haughty relatives by whom she had hitherto been overlooked and neglected! The otherwise high-minded and right-judging man, whose sense of honour was acute upon all other subjects, was alike blind and weak on this. He did not give a thought to the happiness of the bright being who made the sunshine of his home; but, his better feelings warped by ambition and resentment, he looked only to her worldly greatness, and to his own revenge. Every luxury of attire which could enhance her beauty was lavishly

bestowed upon her; and even he himself, unbending as he was to all around him, treated her with a deference which to his jaundiced mind was already a triumph.

CHAPTER V

A FETE CHAMPETRE.

THERE was a brilliant fête at the far-famed villa of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke at Putney; and as Mrs. St. Maur Fulke was the fashion, "all the world" had been intriguing for the last month to procure tickets. Various were the rumours which had been circulated on the subject of the approaching festivity; and the invited were meanwhile busied in preparing their fancy dresses for the occasion, and congratulating themselves upon the charming idea of their hostess, who had positively refused to sanction the admittance of such guests as should present themselves otherwise than *en costume*. The extensive grounds of the villa swept down to the river, where gaily-caparisoned boats with silken awnings lay moored beneath the over-hanging willows; gipsy-tents, dancing-booths, and marquees fitted with counters, and crowded with glittering trifles, which were to be distributed by lottery, dotted the lawns and shrubberies; hidden orchestras made the summer air vocal; and on every side groups of fair women and gallant cavaliers in many-coloured raiment, rendered the whole scene one parterre of moving flowers.

We are not about to describe these more minutely; a fancy fête of this description may be readily imagined; peeresses were content to play peasant girls for the hour, while private gentlemen strutted as kings among the brilliant crowd.

And a crowd in truth it was: for, although Mrs. St. Maur Fulke had resolutely turned a deaf ear to many an earnest entreaty, declaring that she merely sought to assemble her more immediate friends, she was so popular an

individual, and so singularly favoured in that respect, that upwards of seven hundred inmates graced her entertainment. The lively and wealthy little widow herself made a charming *grisette*. Nothing could be more perfect than the arrangement of her magnificent hair, nothing more becoming than the tightly-fitting bodice, and nothing more captivating than the fairy-like foot and ankle which were revealed by the short *jupon*. No wonder that many of the women and all the men were enraptured with Mrs. St. Maur Fulke!

Nevertheless, however, there was one more brilliant and stately beauty who fairly divided with her hostess the admiration of the courtly revellers, and that one was Miss Trevanion, whose dark loveliness was rendered striking by her gipsy garb. Many was the palm extended to invite her predictions, and many the low-breathed and anxious question to which she replied with a dignified composure, well calculated to extinguish the hope that her bright eyes had inspired. For a time her attentive chaperone, Lady Mary, moved majestically beside her, habited as a Sybil; but gradually, as the human kaleidoscope varied its figures, the two ladies became separated by the crowd; other gipsies with dark eyes and hair bewildered the titled duenna in the distance; and finally she relinquished all idea of pursuing her lost charge.

It was a glorious summer day; and the long dark avenues of flowering shrubs, overarched by forest timber, offered their welcome shade to those who sought to escape for a season from the heat and hurry of the open lawns.

Through one of these bowery arcades, a few hours after the commencement of the fête, slowly wandered two figures engaged in a low and evidently engrossing conversation; who, ever as they approached the termination of the *allée*, retraced their steps, as if anxious to secure themselves against intrusion. One of these was Miss Trevanion; but all the dignified playfulness which had won for her the admiration of the groups by which she had been previously surrounded, had totally disappeared. Although her movements were steady and measured, her head was bowed, and the hand which grasped her cloak was so tightly clenched that her small fingers were rigid and bloodless. Her com-

panion, who was dressed as a minstrel, and carried a guitar slung across his shoulder, was evidently several years her junior in age ; his fair hair clustered massively about his cheeks and brow, and his large eyes, of a deep and intense blue, were fringed by long dark lashes upon both the upper and the under lids ; in person he was tall and slight, symmetrically and vigorously formed ; and there was a distinction in his finely-chiselled features and lofty carriage peculiarly attractive.

"It is worse than vain to indulge in such a hope, Sydney," said the lady, despondingly, as they turned once more into the deepest shade of the shrubbery ; "even Lady Mary would not dare to broach the subject to my father, great as her influence undoubtedly is ; and now, as if to render our difficulty still more insurmountable, I am persecuted by the insane pursuit of that superannuated old peer."

"But surely, Ida——"

"Nay, nay," interposed Miss Trevanion, striving to smile, "you need waste no words on him. I have no inclination to purchase a coronet, and as little desire to wear one."

"And cannot you convince your father of that fact—you, who are all-powerful with him?"

"Perhaps I might, but our position would still remain unaltered. For that purpose, as I have already explained to you, I have been reared and educated. My own inclinations have never been consulted ; nor will I hesitate to confess, that until I knew you, I never cared to speculate upon the future ; and my father has consequently lived on in the firm conviction that his wishes would not be thwarted. From this fatal mistake I can anticipate nothing but unhappiness ; for, whatever may be my final decision as regards yourself, I can foresee only displeasure and disappointment on his part."

"And can there be any doubt as to that decision?" asked the young man, earnestly.

"I fear not," was the subdued reply ; "but still I shrink from the contest like a coward. It is not your want of fortune which will operate against you, for as an only child I have more than enough ; but it is——"

"My obscurity," said her companion, bitterly.

"Sydney!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion, with haughty indignation, "you are a gentleman, both by birth and breeding, or *I* never could have loved you; but you have no title to offer to me—and, then——" she paused, and blushed deeply.

"Say on, Ida. What more? I will endeavour to bear all which it may be your pleasure to inflict."

"Your youth,"—murmured the lady.

"Now you are in truth fighting against shadows!" was the impatient retort; "a marvellous disparity of six years, if I mistake not. Can Mr. Trevanion possibly infer from that circumstance that I am unable to protect you?"

"I was not thinking of my father when I urged the objection," said his companion; "no, Sydney; it was born of my own fears. You have assured me, and I believe you, that I am the first woman whom you have ever loved; but where can I find the assurance that I shall be the last?"

"In yourself. Who that has won the affection of Ida Trevanion can ever turn a thought of love upon another of her sex? You do yourself injustice by such an apprehension."

"At this moment you feel all that you declare; of that I have no doubt," was the low reply: "nor will I be guilty of the pitiful affectation of seeming to think otherwise; but time, Sydney, time is a sad magician; and the day may come when even you may feel the imprudence of having bound yourself to a wife even six years your senior."

"Never!" exclaimed the young man, energetically.

"And mark me, Sydney," pursued Miss Trevanion, laying her hand heavily on his arm, and raising her eyes steadily to his; "mark me—for this moment may be the turning-point of both our lives—I could bear all but that. Were such a contingency possible, I could share poverty, hardship, and even exile with you; but one symptom of change, one suspicion of coldness, one dream—mark me, I say once more—one *dream* that you had bestowed upon another the love which you had vowed to me, would kill me. Reflect, therefore, before it is too late. I fear that you have not yet learned to understand my character; to see that under an habitual quietude of manner I conceal a

strength of purpose and a depth of feeling which must make me either supremely happy or infinitely miserable. I must be all or nothing to the man into whose hands I resign my destiny."

"Ida," said her companion, "I have not deserved this doubt. Did I not feel that from the moment in which you become my wife my whole being will be centred in yourself for ever, I would not expose you to the trial which awaits you."

"Again, I say, reflect," continued Miss Trevanion, solemnly; "it is my perfect consciousness of my own nature which causes me to hesitate. Little did I dream when we first met, that in you I saw the arbiter of my destiny; nor can I yet understand that the ordinarily keen-sighted Lady Mary should, up to this hour, have failed to remark the progress of our intimacy."

"My aunt is by no means so blind as you suppose," said the young man, with a quiet smile; "nor would it appear that she considers Sydney Elphinstone so ineligible a match, even for Miss Trevanion, as that young lady herself. Her own sister married a commoner, and was a far happier woman than Lady Mary."

"Do you really mean to infer that she is aware of our attachment?"

"Has she not lost you in the crowd, Ida? Does she not occasionally doze at the opera? Can you have failed to remark the long prosy conversations in which she indulges from time to time, with persons whose intellect she despises, and with whose modes of thinking she has no sympathy?"

Miss Trevanion became suddenly thoughtful; but only for an instant. "No, no; it is not possible," she said firmly; "my father trusts her so implicitly; and it would be too cruel were he to be deceived in us both."

"My assurance that she is our friend gives you no pleasure then, Ida?" said her lover, reproachfully.

"Do not mistake me. I only fear that Lady Mary, in her affection for her nephew and her friend, is unconsciously incurring a frightful responsibility, and may hereafter have cause to regret her indulgence."

"Listen to me," broke in the young man impetuously.

"My position is a painful one. Loving you—and you cannot doubt how well, and how entirely for yourself—I may, and must to the world, appear sordid and interested. This consideration was bitter enough, but it has hitherto been my pride to feel that you at least acquitted me of so base a motive. Would that you were a beggar, Ida! for then, at least——"

"Shame on you!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion; "do not suffer your mind to be sullied for an instant by such a thought. Money!"—and her proud lip curled with all the scorn of one who had never been taught to feel the value of the riches for which she evinced so unequivocal a contempt; "surely you have already betrayed annoyance enough upon that odious subject, and it is quite superfluous to renew it."

"Forgive me; and you *will* do so, when I explain that, conscious of my own suffering upon that point, I was anxious to exonerate my aunt from a similar suspicion. She loves me; I have acknowledged to her that my every hope of happiness depends upon an union with yourself; and thus, if indeed she has betrayed her trust, I can but bless her for the weakness"

"But did she not endeavour to impress upon you the imprudence of such an attachment?"

"I suppose I must acknowledge that she did. She told me, I remember, that Mr. Trevanion was ambitious, and that she could hold out no hope; that my suit would be considered by him, and probably by yourself also, as presumptuous and absurd."

"Absurd?"

"Even so."

"And wherefore?"

"Because it was so evidently hopeless."

"Did not the word imply another meaning?"

"None that I could discover."

"And yet it might be that she meant to show you the absurdity of asking the hand of a woman older than yourself."

"*Again*, Ida!"

"I cannot help it. The conviction haunts me pertinaciously, that, in overlooking so serious a fact, I am wilfully

risking our mutual happiness. Women are so frail, Sydney; they fade so soon; they are at the mercy of a thousand casualties, from which men are free. They are, moreover, so susceptible of wrong, that, although they may appear to forget as well as to forgive, it is strange but true that every new sorrow recalls the memory of past suffering. Griefs and trials which had seemed for a time, even to themselves, to have been outlived and obliterated, add their mental pang to the new wound; and scars, which had apparently closed, bleed again; for the heart is more difficult to heal than the body, and more tenacious of the hurts by which it has been injured. If, then, such be the fate of the most forbearing of the sex, judge what must be the destiny of those whose nature forbids them either to forget or to forgive—for whom the first insult is final—who can hate as fiercely as they can love. Should they not be wary? Should they not shrink from rushing upon their own destruction?”

“Ida, you torture both yourself and me.”

“And it is because I love you, Sydney, that I do so. Because my love is so selfish and so engrossing, that I seek to forge arms against myself. Because I would not that hereafter you should look back with pity or with scorn upon my weakness.”

“And do you in reality believe that I could ever prove so vile an ingrate?”

“I think less of you individually, Sydney, while thus listening to the voice of reason and common sense, than of human nature in the mass. Who can answer for the effect which may be produced upon his nature by time and circumstance?”

“It is in the power of every man of honour to do so.”

“But I would owe nothing to the honour of my husband upon a point like this. Such a safeguard to my pride would but revolt my affection.”

“You distort my meaning, Ida. Is this generous?”

“I know not!” said Miss Trevanion, sadly; “I only feel that in becoming your wife, I should so utterly resign my every chance of happiness into your hands, that, were I to deceive myself, the wreck would be a fatal one.”

“You do not, then, consider me worthy of the trust?”

"As you are, Sydney? Oh, yes! Worthy—most worthy. I only tremble when I reflect upon what you may one day become."

"This discussion is idle and most painful, Ida," said Elphinstone, in an unsteady voice; "I have but assurances to offer, to which you apparently assign no credit. I was not prepared for such mistrust on your part."

"Do not wrong me," was the eager rejoinder; "I do *not* mistrust you—this interview is a sufficient evidence to the contrary; but——"

"But you dare not confide your happiness to my keeping?"

There was silence for a moment, and nothing could be heard in that quiet and secluded avenue, save the sounds of far-off music, the ringing of distant laughter, and the whisperings of the wind through the dense foliage of the over-arching trees; and then came a low murmur of "I do—I will;" and the extended hand of Miss Trevanion was passionately clasped in that of her companion.

"Ida—my own."

"Now, and for ever."

"Without doubt or misgiving?"

"In all faith and trust."

"I will merit both."

"I believe it, Sydney; and on my side I will endeavour to prove to you that I deserve your full and entire affection; and I will strive to forget——"

"Forget nothing, save that you have been unjust to yourself; and if a life-long devotion can repay you for the blessedness which you have conferred on me, it is, and must be yours. Do not imagine for an instant that I am unconscious of the sacrifice which you are willing to make in order to secure my happiness; do not suppose that I am blind to the worldly advantages which you so generously resign for my sake; I am but too keenly alive to their extent. I know that you will be blamed, and even pitied, for bestowing yourself upon a poor and nameless suitor, in the fulness of your beauty, and the zenith of your fashion, when the noblest and the proudest are contending for your favour; but you shall have no cause to regret such a concession."

"I accept the assurance," said Miss Trevanion, tenderly; "I will henceforward throw all misgiving to the winds, and trust implicitly in your affection. We have, however, still to struggle against very formidable difficulties, Sydney; and I confess, that when I think of my father's anger I feel terrified."

"Surely, with such an auxiliary as my aunt, you will be able to overcome the objections of Mr. Trevanion."

"I repeat that I believe them to be insuperable; but, as it has now become my duty to make the attempt, I will not shrink from the task, onerous as it is."

"Would that I could spare you the trial!"

"Impossible! I must meet the displeasure which I shall have incurred, alone; and this, Sydney, will be a sufficient proof of the sincerity of my affection; for, peculiar as he may be on this one point, my father has hitherto been to me all kindness and indulgence; and I cannot involve him in mortification and disappointment without suffering severely on my side. My only consolation will exist in the conviction that he desires my happiness, and that I shall have secured it by uniting myself to the only man who has ever won my love. And now, let us part, or our absence will be remarked."

"So soon, Ida?"

"Believe me, it is better so."

But still they lingered awhile, her hand in his, and conversing in those low tones which are audible rather to the heart than to the ear. And then their hands were more firmly clasped together; their eyes met in a long and eloquent look; the lady emerged into the sunshine, and the gentleman plunged yet deeper into the shadows of the shrubbery. The cheek of Miss Trevanion was pale, but she betrayed no other symptom of emotion; and if she played her adopted part less gaily than before she indulged in that sylvan *tête-à-tête*, there was a graceful languor in her whole deportment which rendered her only the more fascinating and attractive to her assiduous admirers.

Nothing could go off better than the fête of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke; and numerous were the compliments which she received from her reluctantly-departing guests,

warned by a rising moon, that even the most refined pleasures must at last terminate. Nymphs and goddesses folded their shawls and mantles about them; knights and courtiers resolved themselves into mere mortals; carriages thundered to the gates; the voices of servants and policemen were loud in every direction; and Miss Trevanion, handed to her chariot by a minstrel whose plumed hat completely overshadowed his countenance, was soon rolling along the road to London, seated beside the silent and somewhat conscience-stricken Sybil, to whose care she had been confided.

CHAPTER VI.

A REVELATION.

“AND so,” said Mr. Trevanion on the following morning, as he rose from the breakfast-table, and transferred the ‘Morning Post’ to his wife; “the fête of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke was the most brilliant affair of the season. Do you concur in this opinion, Lady Mary?”

“There can be no doubt that it was admirably arranged; and very successful,” was the quiet reply. “In fact I never saw a collection of more effective costumes, or listened to more agreeable music. What say you, Ida?”

“That if the guests were not amused, it was assuredly not the fault of the hostess,” said the young lady.

“You, at least, have every reason to be satisfied,” observed her father; “as I find it recorded in the ‘Post,’ that ‘the lovely and accomplished Miss Trevanion was one of its brightest ornaments;’ although I still maintain that the costume which you selected was by no means that in which I should, had I been consulted on the subject, have counselled *my* daughter to appear.”

“I think that you would have altered your opinion had you seen how admirably Ida enacted her assumed character,” said the indulgent and politic Lady Mary; “I can assure you that it excited general remark.”

Mr. Trevanion acknowledged the courtesy by a gracious bow.

"And it was, moreover, excessively becoming," pursued the family friend; "I never saw the dear girl appear to more advantage. I was quite proud of my charge."

"I hope, madam, that you will never have cause to be otherwise," observed Mr. Trevanion, haughtily; "but that ere long——"

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear sir," interposed the lady, somewhat nervously; "there cannot be a question that the social success of your daughter will augment, while that of so many less highly-gifted girls is terribly apt to diminish. Ida's fashion is now so perfectly established, and the set into which I have had the privilege of introducing her is so thoroughly unexceptionable, that her future station depends entirely upon herself."

"I am convinced," said Mr. Trevanion, with a second lofty bow of acknowledgment, "that she will not lose sight, either of her obligation to you, or of the immense responsibility which now rests upon herself."

"I am sure," whined the thin voice of Mrs. Trevanion, from behind the broad pages of the newspaper, by which she was entirely concealed, "that if Ida is not happy and satisfied, I cannot tell what could make her so."

"My young friend has certainly drawn a prize in the great lottery of life," said the bland Lady Mary, in her smoothest accent.

"A fact of which I trust that she is fully aware," was the sententious rejoinder of the gentleman, as he strode loftily across the floor; "for, truth to say, I can scarcely imagine a want or a wish on her part which she is unable to gratify—young, handsome, and fashionable, with the prospect of a fine fortune, and the offer of a peerage——"

"Can I speak a few words with you in private, papa?" asked Miss Trevanion, in a firm voice, but with a heightened colour.

"In private, Ida! Are we not now sufficiently private for any communication which you may find it necessary to make? Is not Lady Mary one of the family? While your mother——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Trevanion," said the noble widow, with alacrity, at the same time rising from her seat, "I have letters of some importance to write, and shall be glad to commence them as early in the day as possible; you must therefore allow me to retire to my own room."

"As you will, madam; as you will," replied the host, holding back the door with the ceremonious courtesy which he always observed to the other sex: "if such be the case I can of course offer no objection; but were it otherwise——"

"Not a word more, my dear sir; believe me that no apology is necessary; I was about to withdraw as *Ida* spoke:" and gathering the rich folds of her gray damask dress about her, the portly lady disappeared.

"And you, Mrs. Trevanion?" said her husband, interrogatively.

"I would rather that mamma should remain," was the calm remark of his daughter.

"Her opinion upon the subject to be discussed, of whatever nature it may be, cannot but prove valuable," observed Mr. Trevanion, contemptuously.

"That is precisely my own sentiment," said the young lady; "for I have firm faith in her affection for her only child; and as I am about to speak frankly and seriously upon a matter involving my future happiness in life, it will be a sincere gratification to me should she see and feel as I do."

"You have then some doubt as to *my* sympathy," said her father, tartly.

"I confess it; but I do not despair of convincing alike your heart and your reason; for I have also an unshaken trust in your paternal tenderness."

"Enough of this verbal skirmishing, *Ida*. What have you to say? I have business in town to-day, and expect the carriage round every instant."

"I shall not detain you long, sir. You have for the last four years expressed a great desire to see me settled in life, and I consider it my duty to tell you without procrastination or concealment, that my election is made."

"You accept Lord Downmere?"

Miss Trevanion smiled disdainfully. "Decidedly not. I have no ambition to become the wife of a man old enough to be my grandfather."

"A peer of the realm——"

"A selfish sensualist."

"Pshaw! The only chance of married happiness for a woman is to unite herself to a man of twice her own age, who knows how to appreciate her youth and beauty at their proper value. A sensualist! And why not? How can that affect your comfort? An egotist! Trash! Let him indulge himself as he may, *you* are not likely to suffer from his selfishness. Upon this subject I shall admit of no argument, as I have already promised your hand to Lord Downmere."

"Sir!" exclaimed the young lady, indignantly, "I cannot surely have understood you rightly; did you say that you had promised my hand?"

"I did."

"And without my sanction?"

"Even so."

"Then you must excuse me, if I at once declare that I am as little disposed to defer to the tyranny of a father as to that of a husband. We are not, happily, in Circassia, where parents make a trade of their children, and dispose of them to the best bidder; and thus I do not acknowledge the right even of my own parent to transfer me like a bale of merchandise."

"You might at least have spared me that taunt, Miss Trevanion!" exclaimed the merchant with vehemence: "it comes badly from you who are indebted to my self-sacrifice for all the advantages upon which you pride yourself."

"Pardon me, sir; I intended no sarcasm," said his daughter, deprecatingly: "nor can I comprehend how you should for an instant attach such a meaning to my words. My very rejection of the suitor whom you have proposed to me is a sufficient guarantee of my utter indifference to the empty distinctions of rank and name. No one can have a more profound respect for high blood and ancient lineage than myself; but I have no inclination to immolate my happiness at the shrine of mere rank."

"I shall not bandy phrases with you, Miss Trevanion," was the curt reply; "my straightforward mode of speech is no match for your sentimental eloquence; and it would appear that my paternal authority is no curb to your will. Be good enough, therefore, to inform me of your pleasure, in order that I may not waste time which can be more profitably employed."

Tears rose to the eyes of the young lady, but they did not fall. She remained silent for an instant; and then, grasping the hand of her father as it rested upon the back of the chair from which he had risen, she said beseechingly, "Do not be harsh with me! If you only knew how much it costs me to thwart your wishes upon so important a point as this, I am sure that you would rather pity than condemn me; but believe me when I assure you that it is its very importance which gives me strength to do so. You have been so invariably kind and indulgent; you have so long made my happiness your chief care, that I dare not bring myself to suspect your affection when I am about to put it to the test."

"What more?" was the cold inquiry, as Mr. Trevanion withdrew his hand from her clasp.

"I have already declared," said his daughter, retreating a step or two, as if stung by his tone and gesture, "that my election is made—my promise is given—my hand is pledged. That promise and that hand were mine to bestow or to withhold; and I have acted upon the firm conviction that I possessed an undoubted right to decide my own destiny."

"And this conviction has induced you to counteract my wishes, and to disappoint my views. What compensation have you to offer? What brilliant establishment have you secured for yourself which may tend to reconcile me to your disobedience?"

"Will not my future happiness——"

"No romance, if you please, Miss Trevanion. Mine has been a life made up altogether of realities, and I have little taste for supplying incidents for a novel in my own family. Happiness in this world, young lady, as you ought by this time to be aware, implies wealth, station, and influence; and once more I ask you if you have secured these?"

"And on my part, sir, I frankly answer, No."

"Better and better!" was the sarcastic reply of the merchant, as his cheek became livid with suppressed passion; "but pray proceed."

"I will; my hand is pledged, and pledged irrevocably, to Mr. Sydney Elphinstone."

"To *Mr.* Sydney Elphinstone—Indeed!" sneered Mr. Trevanion; while a "Good gracious me!" came from the lounging-chair in which his wife had hitherto sat silent and disregarded.

"A beardless boy, and a penniless pauper," pursued the gentleman, after drawing a long breath; "you do honour to your birth and breeding even by such an inclination, Miss Trevanion. Rest assured, however, that no folly of the kind shall ever be perpetrated in my family; I positively forbid all further mention of the young man's name beneath my roof."

"I much regret, sir——"

"And so do I, madam; so do I; deeply, bitterly regret the degeneracy of a child from whose sense of personal dignity and filial affection I had looked for obedience, and a ready co-operation in my own views. Do you imagine, Miss Trevanion, that I have bestowed a fortune upon your education, and petted and pampered you like a peeress, in order that you may make me the laughing-stock of my haughty relatives?"

"I had flattered myself, sir, that I was indebted for all the advantages and indulgences which I have enjoyed, to your fatherly affection alone."

"Listen to me," said Mr. Trevanion, sternly. "Let my motives be what they might, you owe me tenfold the gratitude which a parent could claim from an ordinary child. Your very birth, madam, was a bitter disappointment. I had married your mother in the hope that she would make me the father of a son; that I might meet Sir Jasper upon equal terms; and that the heir to my wealth might illustrate the family name as proudly as he who was its representative. You know me, and the one ambition of my life, well enough to feel that I became a husband from no selfish seeking after

personal gratification ; I could and should have sufficed to myself, had I not had an ulterior aim—but enough on that subject. *You* were born ; a girl—a woman—and my first hope was frustrated. Your mother bore me no other child, and new prospects opened before me. You were handsome, and I was careful that your beauty should be enhanced by every extraneous aid. I have reared you rather like the daughter of a duke than the heiress of a commoner. I have spared neither gold nor care ; and I believe I may be permitted to hope that neither has been expended injudiciously. I have done more. I have secured to you the services of a woman of rank—do you mark me, Miss Trevanion ? I say—and I say it advisedly—the *services* of a woman of rank ; for, whatever you may feel inclined to think upon the subject, you may trust me when I assure you that there is no leveller like wealth ; and however respectfully we may see fit to treat Lady Mary Brookland, it is not the less certain that her poverty has compelled her to bow her pride ; and that she is as completely my hired dependant as the butler who officiates at my sideboard. And now, allow me to inquire what return you are anxious to make for all my solicitude ? I believed, and I had every right to believe, that the false position in which I had so long lived, must necessarily end when you attained to womanhood, and were competent to secure such a marriage as *my* birth, and your own personal and acquired advantages, rendered expedient. I secured for you the homage of a nobleman, and I was satisfied. I felt that my task was ended, and my object accomplished. I had toiled and waited for years, but I had ultimately effected my purpose ; and I turned back no regret upon the past.”

“ Yet surely, sir, my future happiness may be considered as worthy of some consideration.”

“ I have already requested that you would have the courtesy to spare me all phrase making,” was the impatient retort : “ we are wasting words. Will you, or will you not, Miss Trevanion—I must now insist on your definitive reply—accept the hand of Lord Downmere ? ”

“ I cannot,” said the young lady, with a quivering lip, but

with unabated firmness ; “ I do not even respect him ; and I will never give myself to a man whom I despise.”

“ This is, if I rightly understand, your final determination ? Good. Listen, in your turn, to mine. Become the wife of your pauper-lover, and share his poverty ; marry your boy-suitor, and expose yourself to the ridicule of the world ; but do not expect me to take any part either in the privations or the sarcasms to which you are willing to expose yourself. Do not, moreover, expect that I shall render myself responsible for your obstinacy, or your error,—for I am willing to give it whichever name you please. Whatever may be my disappointment or my mortification, I have still moral courage enough left to assert myself ; and no hardly-earned gains of mine shall go to enrich a son-in-law whom I will never recognise.”

“ My *dear* father——”

“ You have heard my decision, Miss Trevanion. It now remains for you to make yours.”

“ It is made, sir. My word is pledged ; and I should not be your daughter if I failed to redeem it.”

“ The flattery is delicate, but useless and ill-timed. We then thoroughly understand each other ?”

“ I fear so.”

“ Now, don’t be obstinate, *Ida*,” whined out the thin voice from the arm-chair ; “ your father does not like you to marry Mr. Elphinstone—I do not like it—and I am quite sure that Lady Mary will be furious.”

“ Your opinion is, no doubt, a valuable one, Mrs. Trevanion,” said her husband, sarcastically ; “ but, nevertheless, I take the liberty of dissenting from it ; as I am quite prepared to believe that we are indebted to that very lady for the pleasant position in which we now find ourselves.”

“ I can assure you,” commenced his daughter, as a flush of generous indignation burnt upon her cheek and brow, “ that you wrong Lady Mary Brookland, sir, by such a supposition. It is true that she originally presented Mr. Elphinstone to me ; and surely nothing could be more simple than that she should introduce so near a relative to

the members of a family in which she resided ; but, beyond the fact of this introduction, Lady Mary has never made the slightest effort to force Mr. Elphinstone upon my acquaintance."

"Probably not," was the cold reply ; " Lady Mary is a woman of taste and tact, and not likely to commit herself by any overt exertions to that effect : but there are such things, Miss Trevanion, as negative helps—assistance rendered rather by omissions than by active services."

"Is not this ungenerous, sir?"

"It may be so ; but I apprehend that it is not unjust. I cannot be deceived in believing that the admirable 'understanding'—is not that the conventional term applied to such dignified and womanly arrangements as that to which it would appear that you have lent yourself?—must have taken place at the fête of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke. Now, will you permit me to inquire how your chaperone had disposed of herself when this very romantic scene was taking place? Was she present?"

"She was not. We had been accidentally separated by the crowd."

"No doubt. I suspected as much ; and the great extent of the pleasure-grounds naturally rendered it quite impossible that you should meet again until the gentleman had carried his point. It is precisely as I thought ; and confirms me more stedfastly than ever in the conviction, that in every affair of life there is nothing so desirable as to secure the co-operation of persons of sense, who appreciate so admirably the extent of what is required of them ; while simpletons, on the contrary, are like gray hairs—they are always obtrusive, and never can be kept in their right places. I was quite sure that Lady Mary had, in some way, lost sight of you altogether."

"Pardon me, sir, if, in my turn, I remark that we are losing sight of our subject," said Miss Trevanion, with dignity ; "I have already exonerated Lady Mary from all blame, and am quite willing to take upon myself the responsibility of my own actions. I am no child to obey the leading-strings of a nurse—no puppet to dance obedience to

the wires of an exhibitor—but a reflecting and anxious woman, conscious that I hold in my own hands the control of my future destiny.”

“So be it,” contemptuously retorted her father, “and I congratulate you that they are so full, as you are likely to have little else to grasp in them.”

“The jest is a bitter one, but I will not resent it,” said the young lady. “I see and feel, painfully feel, that on the one most important action of my life, there exists no hope of your sympathy. But still, oh, my dear father, still have mercy on me; and do not refuse to me at least your blessing and your forgiveness! Reflect that, in taking so decided a step in opposition to your wishes, I am already sufficiently an object of pity; and do not let me have in addition to apprehend the misery of your permanent displeasure.”

For an instant the lip of Mr. Trevanion quivered, but only for an instant. The proud spirit of the disappointed man was stronger even than his paternal love, and he rallied ere his daughter had time to remark the passing emotion. “My blessing!” he exclaimed, vehemently; “My blessing! On what? On your deliberate disobedience? My forgiveness! Of what? Of your premeditated overthrow of all my hopes? Look for neither, madam; look for neither. Avail yourself of your boasted privilege of free-will—give yourself to a beggar—the law will be your sanction, and I your victim. Let that consciousness suffice you. All further words are needless. I withdraw all opposition—I will offer no impediments to your folly; go, and like other lunatics, rush upon your fate.”

“Father!”

“Enough, Miss Trevanion,” was the stern rejoinder; “I still feel sufficient pity for your madness to accord you four-and-twenty hours to reflect; but, if at the termination of that time, you adhere to your present insane purpose, you will no longer have a father, and will be at perfect liberty to replace his protection by that of any husband you may see fit to select.”

As these words were uttered, Mr. Trevanion hastily left the room, while his daughter sank back upon the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

For a moment only there was silence, as the weak and timid wife had no sooner ascertained the disappearance of her husband, than she roused herself from her habitual apathy, and querulously upbraided her agitated daughter, with what she characteristically designated as her silly and nonsensical obstinacy. The reproaches of Mrs. Trevanion, however, fell unheeded upon the ear of Ida.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOBLE SUITOR.

It is marvellous that, although daily experience should suffice to prove that we are at best the poor creatures of circumstance, the mere puppets of accident, we are all prone to believe that nothing can go on satisfactorily unless, even while professing to trust in Providence, we undertake to guide the whole action of the machinery ourselves; and thus, too often, instead of being, as we fondly and blindly imagine, the spiders that weave the web, we find ourselves, in the end, merely the flies that have been caught in it.

Such was, in a great degree, the case with Mr. Trevanion, who having for years fondly hugged the belief that he had taught all around him to bend to his indomitable will, suddenly found himself opposed by the very being upon whose obedience and submission he had calculated the most securely; and as he rolled towards London, in his well-lung and luxurious chariot, he felt like a person stunned by some sudden blow. Calm and concentrated was his rage; and none who looked on him would have suspected the bitterness of the feelings which were masked by the stern and cold demeanour that he successfully maintained.

For the first time in his life, the proud and self-reliant man was compelled to acknowledge to himself that the obstacle flung upon the path of his ambition *might* prove beyond even *his* strength to remove. There was that in the eye of his daughter during their late conversation, which

convinced him that she had inherited no small portion of his own resolute spirit ; and while he dwelt in moody and wordless anger upon her ingratitude, and recapitulated to himself all the advantages and indulgences by which he had surrounded her from her very cradle, he never once suffered himself to remember that these had been conferred for his own sake rather than for hers ; and that he had built up a dazzling edifice of greatness upon her loveliness, grace, and talent, of which he would not have laid a single stone, had she been less eminently gifted by nature to work out the cherished purpose of his existence.

He thought of his ancestral home and his haughty relatives with a pang at his heart—his cloud-dream of crushing the arrogance and revenging the neglect of Sir Jasper and his wife, by presenting to them his daughter as Countess of Downmere, had vanished ; and how was it replaced ?

As the question shaped itself in his mind, Mr. Trevanion crushed the arms which were folded across his breast almost into the flesh, and set his teeth closely, while his lips grew ashy white. He could better have borne anything than this. Then his thoughts reverted to Lady Mary Brookland, whom, despite his daughter's disclaimer, he was far from exonerating from at least a tacit connivance with her nephew ; but on her, he bitterly felt that it would be impossible to wreak his displeasure. A rupture with the person whom in his heart he silently designated as a titled viper, would effectually disorganise his whole household, and overthrow the work of years. Thanks to the persevering system of contempt which he had pursued towards his wife, she had ended by becoming a mere cypher under her own roof, whose authority was not recognised beyond the circle of her dressing-room ; while the free-masonry of rank would, as a matter of course, induce half his aristocratic acquaintance to adopt the cause of the peer's daughter, and to find food for satire rather than sympathy in his own mortification. No ; happen what might, he felt that he must at least keep up appearances with Mr. Elphinstone's aunt, although it by no means followed that he should for the future place the same implicit reliance on her prudence and loyalty as he had hitherto done.

In any and every point of view, his position was accord-

ingly a perplexing one; and had he not been made of sterner stuff than the generality of his sex, who, however self-sufficing so long as the wheels of life's chariot run smoothly along the broad highway of prosperity and comfort, are prone to turn for help and solace to others when those same wheels become clogged by the mire, and arrested by the masses, of doubt and difficulty, he would have been sorely conscious on that unlucky morning of the height and breadth of the barrier which he had himself built up between his own will and the free agency of those about him. As it was, however, he merely sought to discover the most effectual means of meeting and combating the exigencies of the emergency in which he was placed, single-handed, and resolutely.

As we have already shown by the history of his past life, the nature of Mr. Trevanion was eminently energetic: with him to will had hitherto been to accomplish; and even now he would not suffer himself to believe that he should finally be defeated; Ida's exhibition of spirit had rather startled than convinced him. Women were impulsive, he knew; but he clung to the belief that they were by no means equally consistent. It was the first occasion upon which the wishes of his daughter had been seriously opposed, and she had, almost as a natural consequence, indignantly and determinedly resented that opposition; but when she had taken time to reflect, she must and would see her folly in its true light. It was absurd to suppose that, reared in luxury as she had been, and habituated to have her every desire gratified as soon as expressed, she could be mad enough to cast from her all these advantages to share the comparative penury of a younger brother. No—no—he had only to give her time. Her woman-vanity would do the rest.

The mental argument was a comfortable one; and before Mr. Trevanion reached town the pressure of his folded arms relaxed, his eye lost some portion of its dark fire, and he breathed more freely.

Suddenly a thought struck him; he pulled the check-string; and the carriage, turning down a lateral street, rolled rapidly towards Piccadilly.

The Earl of Downmere was at home; and as Mr. Trevanion had long been a privileged visitor, he was instantly ad-

mitted to the breakfast-room, where his mature lordship sat discussing in solitary state a most *recherché* repast.

Henry Ferdinand, Earl of Downmere, and Baron Woodlyn, was a portly personage of tall stature and stern countenance, who bore his sixty years of life with considerable dignity; smoothly and composedly too, without any attempt to disguise their amount by hair-dye or cosmetic, like one who scorned such puerilities as at once utterly beneath his own notice, and beyond that of others. An equal independence of feeling was also visible in his costume, which, although unexceptionable in material, was worn with a careless disregard to every consideration save that of ease, which betrayed the innate selfishness of the individual; one slipperless foot rested upon the seat of a chair in front of him, and looked suspicious of incipient gout; while the knee of the other leg was covered by a napkin which had become considerably sullied during the process of the meal to which his attention was directed. The *Times* lay on the table, luxuriously bathing one extremity of its colossal sheet in the savoury jelly of a *dindon aux truffes*; while his valet, infinitely better dressed than himself, stood behind his chair, reading aloud from the *Morning Post* the fashionable news of the day. The room in which the peer was seated was gorgeous with gilding, and panelled with family portraits, the most recent in date being a likeness of himself taken in the year of his majority, and forming a woful and saddening contrast with his present appearance. A heavy sofa and a well-cushioned *fauteuil* stood near the fire-place, and a large folding screen partially veiled the door; it was indeed evident in all the details of the apartment that the "creature comforts" of this life were by no means disregarded by its owner; and a feeling of surprise was elicited involuntarily that so thorough a self-seeker as my Lord Downmere should for a moment contemplate the possibility of so great a risk as marriage, tending, as it could not fail to do, to the disturbance of his long-cherished habits of personal indulgence.

The secret lay, however, in the fact that Henry Ferdinand, Earl of Downmere, was the last direct scion of his noble house; his nearest relative and presumptive heir being a second cousin, whom he had never seen, but whom

he had nevertheless honoured with his unqualified dislike. Earlier in life he had resisted all the entreaties of his widowed mother to give a new mistress to Woodlyn Castle—"Time enough yet! Time enough yet!"—was his constant reply to her representations; "I will marry when to do so becomes a duty to my family, but I will not sacrifice myself until I am convinced that it will be necessary to nip the hopes of Mr. Augustus Mordaunt in the bud. Time enough for that, my dear lady-mother."

And so time went on, until the venerable countess was laid in the family vault; and the dashing young noble grew into a staid middle-aged gentleman, who began to weary of hunting, and to sit longer at the dinner table; to forswear waltzing, and to patronise whist. Nor did time even then stand still, but most pertinaciously did it persevere in its progress, until the dark hair, which had once been abundant, grew scanty on the summit of his head, and became thickly streaked with threads of a dull gray; while crows'-feet began to gather beneath his eyes, and to pucker the corners of his mouth. In short, as we have already shown, his lordship had attained to the ripe age of sixty; when even he was reluctantly compelled to admit that if Mr. Augustus Mordaunt were indeed to be baulked of the coveted peerage, it might be as well no longer to delay the bestowal of his name and rank upon a wife.

Then came the difficulty of selection; for, aware of the greatness of the honour to be conferred, the broken-down *roué* was by no means inclined to bestow such advantages upon any woman who could not secure to him a very ample equivalent. Young she must be,—that was a *sine quâ non*—handsome, that was equally indispensable—and wealthy, for he was resolved to exact the price of his coronet—beyond these requisites, however, he asked nothing more: he could dispense with high birth, provided that the respectability of her family was unquestionable; and to her disposition and temper he was perfectly indifferent, being most agreeably satisfied that no wife, be she who she might, would long venture to oppose his will.

Even when he had conceded thus much, however, the difficulty was no slight one, as many young, beautiful, and

well-dowried women were to the full as conscious of the value of their advantages as Lord Downmère of his own, and unhesitatingly declined to barter them for an empty title: and thus he had been half a dozen times civilly rejected by as many reigning beauties, when he accidentally made the acquaintance of Ida Trevanion. The repulses to which his lordship had by this time been subjected had, however, taught him caution; he began to understand that people as frequently overdo things in this world by a want of judgment, as they neglect what is necessary to be done by a want of energy; and he consequently resolved on the present occasion to ascertain in how far the *prestige* of his rank would influence the father of the lady in his favour, and to what extent he might trust to Mr. Trevanion's authority over his daughter, before he committed himself by a direct offer of his hand.

No proceeding could have been more judicious under the circumstances; and accordingly but a few weeks elapsed ere the peer, who had most graciously extended the right hand of friendship to the princely merchant, became satisfied that Mr. Trevanion would consider no sacrifice too great by which he could place a coronet on the brow of his beautiful heiress. Lord Downmere easily detected his weakness, but he was far from suspecting the motive; and while he haughtily, and somewhat contemptuously, assured himself that the man of commerce estimated his rank and birth at their full value, he was little aware that in this instance the commoner was by far the prouder individual of the two—the true nobleman in heart and feeling—and that the ancient blood which throbbed and leaped in his pulses when the earl at length confided to him the passion which he professed to feel for the fair Ida, was quickened, not by the prospect of a titled son-in-law, but by that held out to him of social self-assertion.

The character and temperament of Mr. Trevanion had, moreover, satisfied Lord Downmere that he was not a man likely to yield his own judgment or wishes to those of his child upon so serious a point as marriage, when he saw him steadily enforce them on all around him, upon occasions of comparatively minor importance; and thus, having secured

the consent of her father, he took little pains to ingratiate himself with the young lady in any other way than by making the most liberal settlements; a generosity greatly increased by his consciousness that the magnificent fortune of his intended bride rendered it altogether supererogatory; and while Mr. Sydney Elphinstone was breathing his tale of love into the ears of the listening beauty, his self-complacent rival was trotting his hack in the ring, and dozing over crown points at the whist-table of his club.

When the pretensions of Lord Downmere were made known to Miss Trevanion by her father she smiled incredulously, and merely asked if the poor old gentleman were insane; but when she found his suit urged upon her firmly and imperatively, she coldly declared that she would never consent to listen to its repetition. The rage of Mr. Trevanion was unbounded at this open opposition to his will, but he succeeded by a strong effort in controlling it; and abruptly informing her that he should ere long insist on her obedience, he sternly left the room; while his weak-minded wife, who "loved a lord," not, like her haughty helpmate, as a glittering tool wherewith to work out his own purposes, but purely and wholly for the pleasure of feeling that she was of sufficient importance to be the associate of nobles, poured forth a rapid flood of wondering reproaches upon the devoted head of her daughter; could not conceive what she could expect if she could afford to refuse an earl—to wear a countess's coronet—and perhaps, for anything she knew to the contrary, to become a member of her Majesty's household. It was really too bad—it was cruel to *her*, for she should have liked so much to have been the mother-in-law of a peer. However, she had one consolation, and that was, that she knew Mr. Trevanion well enough to be quite sure that Ida must yield in the end, for it was of no use to attempt to oppose his will.

"And is it possible, mamma," asked the proud girl with an indignant blush, "that you can wish to see the happiness of your only child sacrificed to such puerilities as those you have mentioned?"

"Nonsense, Ida," was the peevish retort; "surely, with my experience, I must know best what constitutes happi-

ness; I tell you that if I had married a peer, I should have been the happiest woman alive."

Miss Trevanion sighed. She had too much respect for her spirit-crushed mother to express the contempt with which she listened to her childish wailings: and from that day neither of her parents had reverted to the subject of Lord Downmere's proposal until the morning upon which we first introduced them to our readers.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOCIAL TACTICS.

EVEN at the close of the unpromising conversation recorded in the last chapter, Mr. Trevanion had not, as we have already stated, abandoned all hope of ultimate success; but, misjudging the lofty nature of his daughter, had so far deluded himself before he reached town, as to believe that the vanity of the young beauty was piqued by the carelessness of Lord Downmere's courtship.

"Natural enough! Natural enough!" he murmured to himself, with a grim smile. "He has played his cards badly, and deserves to lose her; nor would I move a finger to assist him, were it not for my own sake. But he is necessary to my scheme of vengeance, and I must give him a hint to be more cautious for the future."

And, full of his newly-born hope, the stately merchant entered the breakfast-room of his noble friend.

"Hah! Trevanion, my good fellow," was the greeting of the peer, as, with a portion of *pâté de foie gras* provided upon his fork, he extended two fingers of his left hand to his visitor, "you are early to-day. Have you breakfasted? or will you join me?—No—well, then, take a seat, and excuse me if I finish my breakfast. How are the ladies?"

"Perfectly well, my lord, I am obliged to you; and my somewhat untimely visit——"

"Never ill-timed, Trevanion, never ill-timed," interposed the host; "always delighted to see you, as a matter of course. I was about to drive to Richmond to-day to pay my respects to my fair enslaver, and to inquire after her health."

"I am glad to hear it," said the merchant, "and trust that you will still persist in your intention, for I will frankly tell you that it was to suggest a little more devotion on your part to Ida that I drove to Piccadilly this morning. Young ladies, as your lordship must be aware, like to be wooed as well as won, and I begin to fear that the paucity of your visits has already produced a bad effect upon the mind of my daughter."

"Pooh! pooh!" chuckled the old earl; "you deceive yourself. Girls are fond enough, no doubt, of being dangled after by a bevy of smart young fellows, who, like French poodles, are skilled in the art to fetch and carry; but when a man reaches my age, he is only in the way in a lady's drawing-room; and I am much mistaken if Miss Trevanion does not see the matter with the same eyes as myself. She is a fine creature, a very fine creature, and will adorn her coronet, but I have no intention to make her purchase it too dearly. I am a man of the world, Trevanion, and have a most particular aversion to degenerating into a bore."

"My dear lord——"

"Nay, nay, no dis-claimers. We are both rational beings; I have a sincere regard for your daughter—I admire her exceedingly—she is a superb woman,—and as Countess of Downmere will, I am convinced, do honour both to her father and her husband; but I do not expect impossibilities; and I am as little inclined to interfere with her comfort, as I am to sacrifice my own. I have, moreover, already seen enough of Miss Trevanion to feel certain that I am pursuing the best method of securing her favour."

"You must pardon me if I persist in doubting it," replied the visitor. "Ida has been so long accustomed to adulation and homage that her vanity cannot fail to be piqued by your apparent indifference, contrasting as it does so forcibly with the devoted attentions of the other candidates for her preference. I can quite understand that your lord-

ship conceives (and very properly) that the honour which you have conferred on her by the offer of your hand must necessarily more than counterbalance all such puerile considerations; but women, especially handsome ones, are capricious and exacting; nor can we, while our mighty world itself works on such pigmy hinges, afford to be too severe upon them."

"Well, well," said Lord Downmere, somewhat impatiently, "I shall decidedly drive to Richmond to-day, and come to a more explicit understanding with the young lady herself. I should, no doubt, have done so before, had you not assured me that I might safely leave the affair in your hands; an arrangement which struck me as being, under all circumstances, an excellent one. I never, even in my young days, was a lady's man; nor should I have so far disorganised all my habits at my present time of life as to take a wife, were it not that the duty which I owe to my name demands it. I ask of the Countess of Downmere to give me an heir in return for the coronet which I place upon her brow, and I exact no more. As for love, my good sir, it is a mere myth in the fashionable world at the present day; an *ignis fatuus*, a Will-o'-the-wisp, just as unattainable as the rainbow; and I am too reasonable a man to clutch at a vapour."

"But surely, my lord, you will not be rash enough to explain yourself thus to my daughter?"

"No, no, Trevanion; I have not walked through the by-ways of society for so many years not to understand the sex at least better than that. I have, as you may perceive, no remnant of romance left in me, always supposing that I ever possessed any; and I have no faith in 'mutual affection,' and 'disinterested sacrifice,' and 'self-immolation,' and all this fiddle-faddle which supplies the raw material of the novel-writers. When I officially offer myself to Miss Trevanion, I shall do so by urging upon her acceptance my rank and the family diamonds; I shall talk to her, not of my own feelings, but of Woodlyn Castle and Downmere Abbey; not of the colour of her eyes, but of the style of her equipages;—I shall appeal to her ambition, not to her heart; excite her self-value, not her sensibilities; and, rely on it,

that my method is the only rational one with any woman who has passed her teens, and learned to look at life in its true aspect. Taxes upon vanity do not require to be voted by Parliament; they can always be levied without difficulty; and I am greatly deceived in you, my good friend, if you have reared your daughter for the purpose of seeing her settle herself in a cottage overgrown with honeysuckles, and overrun with earwigs."

"Far from it, my lord; far from it," replied Mr. Trevanion; "nor is Ida Trevanion at all calculated for a life of privation and struggle; a conviction which tended to increase my satisfaction when your lordship did me the favour to demand her hand. Indeed, so thoroughly resolved have I ever been that she should only marry into that sphere in which she is so well calculated to shine, and thus to re-integrate not only herself, but me also, in the position which I lost through the injustice of my relatives, that I assured her—and with truth—that in the event of her disappointing my wishes, not one shilling of my property should ever devolve to her."

"A forcible argument," smiled the earl, complacently, stroking down the leg which rested on the chair before him; "and one which will, no doubt, prove more efficacious than a whole volume of sentiment. You are a sensible man, Mr. Trevanion, a very sensible man; and the conviction that you were superior even to your present position—highly honourable as that is in itself, I admit—was, to me, one great inducement to overlook what some of my friends were inclined to consider as an inequality of rank, when I offered my hand to your daughter."

The blood rose to the cheek of the merchant. "Your lordship does me honour," he said, coldly; "but I trust that even elevated as your position undoubtedly is, the contemplated marriage can scarcely be regarded a *mésalliance*. My own family——"

"I know it, my good sir, I know it," hastily interposed the peer; "on her *father's* side Miss Trevanion had every right to pretend to the rank which I am happy enough to offer to her—while, as regards her maternal descent, why, we must accept her youth, beauty, and accomplishments as

a substitute for blood. I have already carefully considered all the bearings of the question, and am satisfied with the result. It is, however, unfortunate that you are not on terms with your uncle, as his presence at the ceremony would have given a *prestige* to the affair which would have told well in the world. Not that the thing is material, certainly not; *my* position is one which, as a natural consequence, renders me independent of such considerations; and I confess that I shall regard myself as a very happy man when I become the possessor of so much youth and beauty; and feel, as I shall have every right to do, that I have fulfilled to the letter the duty which I owed to my family."

"I am obliged by so flattering an assurance," said Mr. Trevanion, though he looked infinitely less gratified than he sought to appear; "nor do I apprehend that your lordship need fear any very severe animadversion on the part of your friends when the dowry of my daughter is taken into consideration in addition to her personal merits."

"True, true," replied the earl, somewhat impatiently; "but, after all, are we not rather premature in our self gratulation, if, as you hinted a while back, I have failed to find favour in the eyes of the young lady herself?"

"Nay, nay; I can admit no such construction of my remark," objected the merchant; "I merely sought to impress upon your lordship the policy of a little more attention on your part."

"While I, on the contrary, give myself no small credit for my diplomacy, my good friend," said Lord Downmere; "charming as she is, my fair bride-elect is still a woman, and she may have no especial taste for a husband whose years outnumber those of her father; thus, rely on it, the less I absorb her time and attention the more likely she will be to overlook the disparity, which is, I flatter myself, the only valid objection which she can offer to our union."

"I think, my lord," said Mr. Trevanion, "that you do Ida injustice as well as yourself. Time—when we bring ourselves to look the truth steadily in the face—is to the full as much our friend as our enemy. He plants wrinkles in

our foreheads, I admit, but even while doing so, he engrafts wisdom in our hearts; he strews threads of silver among our hair, but he condenses experience and warning in our minds, and thus more than compensates for his petty larcenies by a full-handed liberality which we are too slow to acknowledge until its actual value is forced upon us."

"A very happy view of the case, my good sir, and one which deserves to become popular," replied the peer, petting his gouty leg with increased tenderness; "though, unfortunately, it is never likely to do so. It is a trite saying that gray hairs are honourable, and there can be no doubt of the fact; but it is equally certain that it is an honour with which every one is satisfied to dispense as long as possible. However, as you advise me to venture upon a more assiduous course of homage, I shall follow your counsel, only hoping that you may have been able to inspire your brilliant daughter with a portion of your own wisdom."

"I am glad that you have arrived at such a resolution, my lord, for trust me when I assure you that no woman's heart is to be won by proxy."

"Heart? pshaw! do not let us travel back into Utopia, Trevanion; I have already been sufficiently explicit as to my anticipations on that score. Hearts are mere heavy luggage with which to be hampered on the journey of life, and it is far better to travel untrammelled. It is Miss Trevanion's *hand* which I have asked of you, and which I shall ask of herself; she is a gentlewoman and a woman of the world; she will, therefore, understand what is due to both of us, and I require no more.—I wish that I could induce you to try one of these *côtelettes au jus*—my cook is famous for them."

"I am obliged to you, my lord, but I have already breakfasted."

"I am sorry for it, for I can conscientiously recommend them. However, you know best. Well then, I will decidedly drive to Richmond this morning, and settle the business. I am no friend to delay when once a thing is decided in my own mind; and, under all circumstances, I think that the sooner matters are concluded on this occasion

the better. The season is nearly over, town is beginning to thin, and Miss Trevanion will not, in all probability, be averse to spending her summer at Woodlyn Castle."

We have said that Mr. Trevanion was a proud man, and so in truth he was; and yet, so resolutely did he cling to his one darling project, that he bent his haughty spirit to tolerate the insolent egotism of the cold-hearted noble, who was, should he succeed in overcoming the repugnance of his daughter, to render that daughter the instrument of his revenge upon his relations. Had he witnessed a similar exhibition of self-abasement in another, his contempt would have known no bounds, but he was blinded to his own degradation by the wretched idiosyncrasy which he had nourished for years, and which had been the hidden spring of his every thought and action.

That Ida, the proud, the beautiful, and the gifted, should be wooed after such a fashion might well have revolted him, but he would not look beyond the fact that the wooer was one whose rank and station must compel the haughty spirit of Sir Jasper to bend before him; while they would, in all probability, induce him to sue for a renewal of that intercourse which he had been so eager to terminate for ever. The only doubt by which he was tormented was caused by Ida herself; he did not forget throughout the interview which he had courted, and during which he had suffered an amount of mortification greater than any to which he had ever been subjected since the day on which he became an alien and an outcast from the home of his ancestors—he did not for one moment forget that when he had parted from his daughter, he had left her in no mood to tolerate the addresses of her titled suitor; she might persist in the insane resolve which she had announced to him—she might peremptorily decline the hand of the earl, and thus thwart the hope of his whole life—she might—but no! Lord Downmere had truly said that, after all, beautiful as she was, gifted as she was, she was a woman, and

"Therefore to be won,"

as she no doubt would be, by the glitter of a coronet, with its concomitant attractions. And so Mr. Trevanion sagely

resolved to think no more of the matter until he returned home to ascertain the result of the peer's visit; and he accordingly proceeded to the city, transacted business as usual, authorised the transfer of thousands, dictated letters, and occupied himself as he was wont to do, haunted throughout every detail by the flashing eye and firm demeanour of his rebel child, and wincing from time to time as the suspicion would force itself upon him, that her will might after all prove as unbending as his own.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOVER AND HIS MISTRESS.

THE life of Miss Trevanion had hitherto flowed on with all the smoothness of a rivulet, shadowed perhaps at times by some slight sorrow, as the stream is darkened by an overhanging bough, but soon recovering its brilliancy, and once more gliding gladly onward under the broad light of a sunny heaven. Happy in the present and confident in the future, the petted heiress had known no real care; nor had she even guessed how fatally her own nature was constituted to ruffle the current of its existence when its tide should be impeded by adverse circumstances, until she became conscious of a growing partiality for Sydney Elphinstone. When the suspicion of this preference first arose in her mind, she struggled resolutely against it, for not only did she at once perceive that such an attachment must inevitably prove distasteful to her father, to whose ambition she was no stranger, but it also revolted her own good sense when she remembered that she was several years his senior; while it must at the same time be confessed that her vanity took the alarm, as such was by no means the realisation of her previous dreams.

Accustomed from her earliest youth to regard high rank as the foundation of all earthly honour and even happiness she had ever associated the idea of marriage with luxury

and station. She had, in fact, dreamed as girls ever dream before that inner life, which is the most powerful position of existence, is aroused; and while fancy supplies the place of feeling, such baseless visions suffice to employ the imagination; but where the nature is finely organised they seldom endure long; the heart makes its low whispers heard, faintly indeed, it may be, for a time, but so perseveringly that they cannot long remain unheeded; and then commences the stern conflict between the real and the ideal, the sharp warfare between the outer world of action and the inner world of passion, which may indeed be hidden from the crowd, but never wholly deadened save in despair or in the grave.

Miss Trevanion was startled by the vehemence of her own feelings. Accustomed as she had been to see herself the first object with all around her, the idol and the pride of her family, to whom her every wish was a law, she had never suspected the depth and strength of her own nature; but when, ere Mr. Elphinstone had ventured to hint at his admiration for herself, she on one occasion saw him apparently engrossed by a fair girl for whom she had previously felt a warm regard, she became painfully aware that she could hate as intensely as she could love; and that her life was destined to be one of perfect happiness or misery. The discovery startled her, and she strove earnestly to liberate herself from the growing thralldom of a passion which both her reason and her pride condemned; but she found both pride and reason powerless before it; high-sounding titles became mere empty words; wealth and station worthless units in the heart's reckoning; and when, after a brief and ineffectual struggle against a weakness for which none could blame her more bitterly than she accused herself, she consented to pledge her faith to the nephew of Lady Mary Brookland, she yielded up her whole soul to the new and delicious feeling which the assurance of his affection rendered legitimate and sacred.

Still, however, there were moments when she shrank appalled from the strange knowledge which she had so suddenly acquired of herself—when she became aware of the smothered fire within, which, should it ever burst forth,

must involve not only her own wretchedness, but that of those who were most dear to her; her pride, her vanity, and her ambition were but as straws borne before the lava-stream of her passion, and buried beneath its burning tide. She learnt—and it was a fearful lesson—that while she could give away her whole heart without one reservation, so could she, in like manner, revenge the perfidy by which the full and perfect gift might be cast back upon her.

As this conviction grew upon her mind, she thrust the massy braids from her burning brow, and literally gasped for breath. “It is unwomanly—it is fiendish”—she murmured to herself; “and yet I feel that even so it is. I love him with all the impetuous fervour of my nature; but should he fail—should I be deceived in him—that love will burn into a flame of hate that must destroy us both. Why did he ever cross my path? Why was he thrust upon me? Tutors as I have been for a far different fate, why should he have been gifted with the power of teaching me that I had a heart? I might have gone through life as I had commenced it, toying with trifles, and emulous only of admiration; but now I have cast all my chance of happiness upon one stake, and should I lose it, I shall be worse than beggared!”

It was from such a train of thought as this that Miss Trevanion was aroused by the announcement of the earl’s visit. A more timid spirit than her own might have been occupied by her late misunderstanding with her father—the first, be it remembered, which had ever occurred between them,—and by his threat of making her want of obedience to his wishes the signal of their total estrangement; but not even for an instant had her thoughts been engrossed by that circumstance, important as it was to her future fate. The intensity of her passion, and the wild jealousy of an exacting nature, rendered all other considerations insignificant in her eyes. She remembered, she felt, only the *possibility* of change in her heart’s idol; she cared not for the struggle, the sacrifices, by which she must win him to herself; she dwelt only on the dread that when won, he might be found wanting—and then?—what would remain to her then? The suffocating throbs of her tortured heart, the fire which

shot from her flashing eyes, and the fierce clenching of her slender fingers, afforded a mute but eloquent reply.

As Lord Downmere entered the apartment, Miss Trevanion rose calmly from her seat. It is often in moments of the most intense emotion that strong natures exhibit the greatest power of self-control. She did not dislike the titled egotist who sought her hand, she simply despised him; and although she intuitively suspected the purport of his visit, she received him with as much indifference as though it had merely been dictated by common courtesy.

The storm of passion which had just swept over her spirit had meanwhile tended to heighten her peculiar style of beauty; a warm flush burnt upon her cheek; a brilliant light danced in her eye, and there was a proud stateliness in her whole appearance which for a moment startled even the unimpressible peer.

"I will ring and inform my mother of your lordship's visit, with your permission," she said, coldly, as she advanced to the bell; but ere she had reached it, she was arrested by the voice of the earl, who exclaimed eagerly, "By no means, Miss Trevanion. I beg that Mrs. Trevanion may not be disturbed on my account. My visit was to yourself."

The lady withdrew her hand, and resumed her seat.

"You will no doubt divine its purport," continued Lord Downmere, with more embarrassment than he had ever before felt in the presence of any individual upon whom he believed himself about to confer a favour; "your father was with me this morning, and he has led me to anticipate—to hope—that my presence here to-day will not be unwelcome to you."

"By no means, my lord," was the reply; "this is the hour at which we are accustomed to receive our friends."

"But it is not simply as a friend that I am here," resumed the earl; "you must be quite aware, Miss Trevanion, of the admiration—the regard—which I have long felt for you; and you will not therefore be surprised to learn that my errand is to lay myself and my coronet at your feet, and to declare to you that I shall be the happiest of men should I prevail on you to accept the offering."

"I am not surprised, my lord," said Miss Trevanion, re-

taining all her previous composure ; “ I will not be guilty of the pitiful affectation of assuming an astonishment which I do not feel ; but while I beg of you to receive my acknowledgments for the honour which you desire to confer on me, I am compelled to decline it.”

“ Very prettily expressed,” smiled the peer, emphatically. “ I am aware that such is always the first reply of every lady under similar circumstances ; but after what has passed between your excellent father and myself, I feel confident that before we part we shall come to a better understanding. In short, my dear Miss Trevanion, after mature reflection, I have arrived at the conviction, that you are the only woman upon whom I could confer, without one misgiving, the title of Countess of Downmere. I am not a young man, but I can still appreciate all the perfections of your sex ; and in yourself——”

“ I entreat of you, my lord, not to deceive yourself,” interposed his listener ; “ my words were so far from being words of course, that I must request you to receive them in all the strength and fulness of their meaning. I am greatly flattered by your good opinion, and shall be proud to retain you as a friend, but that can be the only bond between us.”

“ You cannot be serious, Miss Trevanion——”

“ Perfectly so. In seeking my hand your lordship has been guilty of a grave mistake. We are by no means suited to each other.”

“ Is it the incompatibility of age ?” demanded the earl.

“ By no means,” was the reply, as a slight flush rose to the cheek of the lady ; “ I do not deem the question of age of the slightest consideration in affairs like the present.”

“ What, then, can be your objection ? I can offer you rank, wealth, and station.”

“ I am quite aware of the fact, and must be excused if I confess that I attach little value to merely worldly advantages.”

“ The finest diamonds in England, not excepting Her Majesty’s,” followed up the persevering peer.

Ida smiled a smile of scorn, as she said, disdainfully, “ Affection and regard are not marketable commodities even in this commercial country : and, as to the diamonds, your

lordship will, no doubt, find little difficulty in inducing some far more worthy person than myself to wear them."

"I confess," said the discomfited suitor, "that I do not understand your meaning, Miss Trevanion, when you so unhesitatingly declare that we are not suited to each other; I am by no means of an exacting nature; you will have no interference to apprehend from me, and I cannot help thinking that, when once united, we should find many points of resemblance; or, at all events, constant communion would soon induce it."

"Your lordship must pardon me if I declare that I should consider the experiment to be highly dangerous," was the reply. "Souls of mere ordinary calibre may lose their distinctive qualities, and, blending into one common mass, neutralise each other; but when individuals are possessed of refined and elastic minds, they do well to remember that there is a point at which attraction may change into repulsion, and not rashly incur so great and fatal a risk."

"In the present case there can at least be no danger of such a result," said Lord Downmere; "and I confess that after my late interview with her father, I was altogether unprepared for such determined coldness on the part of Miss Trevanion; nor is it quite fair to augment my regret at her obduracy by forcing upon me the conviction that she is a wit as well as a beauty."

"Do not say so, my lord; do not say so," exclaimed his companion, earnestly; "I am the last of my sex to strive after the reputation of a wit. It is like laying down the cestus of Venus to brandish the club of Hercules, and a woman's strength is, or ought to be, unequal to the task. But your lordship has twice alluded to a recent interview with my father. You surely cannot seek to infer that he led you to believe—to anticipate——"

"Pardon me, Miss Trevanion; I received every encouragement from your father to prosecute my suit—every promise of his own influence—and, such being the case, you will readily understand that I am not to be lightly discouraged. Despite your disclaimer, I suspect that I have in reality taken you by surprise, and that you require time for consideration. You shall have it. I can afford to wait

for a few days in order to secure so rich a prize. I will not intrude upon you further upon this occasion. I have faith in the future; and shall leave Mr. Trevanion to explain to you certain points—worldly points—which, in the enthusiasm of your age, you have in all probability overlooked.”

“I am obliged by your intention, my lord, but I must request that you will not leave me with so mistaken a view of my character and sentiments,” said the young lady. “I grieve, deeply grieve, that my father should have misled you, and trust that you will at least exonerate me from the imputation of a similar error.”

“Good morning, Miss Trevanion,” said the earl, blandly stretching forth his hand; “I leave my case to the advocacy of your father, for, as I before remarked, he can, with more propriety than myself, place before you in their fitting light the advantages which you appear so willing to forego. Be good enough to offer my respects to Mrs. Trevanion. I shall wait your final decision with impatience.”

And as he ceased speaking, Lord Downmere bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH

THE dressing-bell had rung before Mr. Trevanion reached home, and he was consequently compelled to wait with such patience as he could command for the information which he was anxious to obtain of the result of Lord Downmere’s appeal to his daughter, a circumstance which by no means tended to tranquillise his nerves, as the more he suffered his thoughts to dwell upon the previous conversation between himself and Ida, the less confidence he felt in his power to shake her resolution. Like a child who has succeeded in building up a card-house story by story until it has reached a height almost unhopèd for, he dreaded lest his next movement might bring the whole unstable edifice in ruin about

him; and yet the move must be made; the work must be terminated; and every moment of suspense became intolerable to him. He hastened his toilette, and descended to the drawing-room, although aware that even should his daughter be already there, a subject of such intense importance to both of them could not be broached with any prospect of a final arrangement in the brief interval between that time and the announcement of dinner; but as the moment approached which was to decide the fruition or the overthrow of his cherished hope, he became restless and irritable, and the self-control which he had exercised throughout the previous portion of the day altogether abandoned him. He threw himself heavily into his well-cushioned chair, caught up the daily paper which lay upon his reading-table, "pished" and "pshawed" over its columns as if each had contained some intelligence peculiarly distasteful to him, and finally suffered it to fall from his hand, and sank into a deep fit of musing. That his reflections were anything but pleasant ones might be detected at once, for his brow darkened, and he beat nervously upon the floor with his foot, as he sat with his head bent upon his breast, and his gaze riveted upon the carpet. ~~Through~~ out the whole of his career, with Mr. Trevanion to will had been to accomplish. Even as a boy he had never, as we have shown, suffered himself to be discouraged even under the most trying circumstances, but having fixed his eye steadily upon one point, he had exerted all the energies of his mind to reach it. For this purpose he had compelled his haughty spirit to commerce—for this purpose he had united himself to a woman for whose intellect he entertained the most sovereign contempt, and to whose person he was utterly indifferent; for this purpose he had tolerated and even courted a man whose only recommendation was his exalted position in society; and now, when the goal was almost reached, he suddenly found himself thwarted by his own child; found an apparently impassable barrier raised upon his own hearth; and after having compelled success on the broad highway of the world, discovered that utter defeat might await him in his home, where he had hitherto believed himself to be all-powerful.

To his stern and unbending nature this first check, end as it might, was gall and wormwood; he felt humbled when he found himself compelled to measure his strength with that of a mere girl, for as such he still regarded his daughter; it was monstrous to feel that she could venture to oppose his wishes, be they what they might, and still more monstrous to know that she held his destiny in her hands. He was impatient for her appearance; he believed that he could instantly divine from her manner the determination at which she had arrived; but first Mrs. Trevanion entered the room with her faint greeting, to which he replied only by a slight movement of the head, as she slid into her accustomed seat, and drew her shawl about her without hazarding a second remark; and next Lady Mary Brookland sailed majestically in, heralded by the sharp rustling of her rich dress, and smiling blandly upon her host, who, had he dared to betray the real feeling with which he once more met her, would not assuredly have welcomed her appearance by the words of studied courtesy which he compelled himself to utter; and then, just when the last bell rang, the butler, as he threw open the door, at once admitted Miss Trevanion and announced dinner.

The merchant turned one glance—and but one—upon his daughter, ere, according to his usual custom, he offered his arm to Lady Mary, and the result of that glance was unsatisfactory, affording as it did no solution of the mystery which he sought to penetrate. She was as calm, as graceful, and as self-possessed as though her fair brow had never been ruffled by an anxiety or a care; and as he proceeded to the dining-room the stern expression of Mr. Trevanion's features became sterner still. Had she betrayed emotion of any kind, had he detected the faintest flush of anger upon her cheek, the slightest flash of defiance in her eye, the least tremor in her voice, as she moved across the floor to assist her mother from the room, he would have been satisfied, for he might have read irresolution, fear, or temper in such indications of feeling, but he had not studied human nature so closely for years without learning that a settled purpose never betrays itself by petty weaknesses.

At table Miss Trevanion was neither more silent nor

more voluble than usual; her well-modulated voice retained its accustomed tone as she addressed her father; she listened to her mother's captious complaints and to Lady Mary's brilliant small-talk as patiently and as courteously as was her habit; and vainly did her father watch for one symptom of discomposure or uneasiness.

"The struggle will be a sharp one," murmured the merchant to himself, as on the termination of the meal the ladies retired, and he rose and paced the floor like a caged lion; "well, be it so; it will not be the first from which I have come out the victor. She conceives my threat to have been an idle one, and does not believe that I shall meet her determination with one as firm. She presumes upon my affection while she makes no effort to retain it. She does not know that, like a child playing with the fire, she will be the victim of her own folly. But it shall be so: I will not be the only sacrifice. The labour of a whole existence shall not be lost through the headstrong obstinacy of a woman, without her bearing her own share of the suffering. Let her refuse Lord Downmere at her peril. She shall become his wife—she shall work out the one great purpose of my existence, or I will disown her for ever—cast her off to the poverty which she affects to treat so lightly—leave her free to beggar herself with her penniless husband, and to feel how widely the fact of such a sacrifice differs from its theory. But I must learn what passed between her and the earl. I was a fool to urge his coming here to-day while the spirit of resistance was still strong upon her: no doubt the selfish dotard piqued her pride by his assumption of superiority. I should have been present at the interview; but all is not yet lost; the hour of weakness is over; she owes me the obedience of a child, and I will exact it."

Full of this resolution, Mr. Trevanion passed into the library, and ringing the bell with violence, directed that his daughter might be informed that he desired her presence. His summons was promptly obeyed, and he had scarcely seated himself when, with a calm step and a steady eye, Ida entered his apartment.

"I have sent for you, Miss Trevanion," he commenced as she advanced towards him, "in order to learn the result

of Lord Downmere's visit; with his motive I am already acquainted; and I now wish to hear what reply was made to his proposal."

"It was declined, sir, definitively, but I trust courteously."

"And did his lordship bow to such a decision, may I ask? Was he satisfied to receive as a final answer the rejection with which you saw fit to requite the honour that he had done you?"

"I hope, sir, that I left no doubt upon his mind of the sincerity of my meaning. I should scorn to trifle with the feelings of an individual who had evinced towards me the preference expressed by Lord Downmere."

"That is no answer to my question, Miss Trevanion," said her father, harshly; "I desire to know whether his lordship parted from you, convinced that his suit was unsuccessful."

"As far as regarded my own feelings and determination, most certainly."

"But he did not, nevertheless, consent to resign his pretensions—is that what I am to understand?"

"Precisely. He professed to leave his cause in your hands, sir, believing, or affecting to believe, that his rank, his wealth, and the family diamonds, would plead in his favour more forcibly with yourself than with me."

"Be careful, young lady, you assume a tone strangely unbecoming in our relative positions. Do not add disrespect to your disobedience."

"You mistake me painfully if you suppose me capable of sarcasm," said Miss Trevanion, and for a moment her lip quivered; "no, sir; the contempt which my tone perhaps involuntarily betrayed, was called forth by the scorn I felt for the man who could suspect *my* father to be guilty of so much meanness."

"Seat yourself, Ida, and listen to me," said Mr. Trevanion, more mildly than he had yet spoken. "It is essential that we should perfectly understand each other, for this is an important crisis in both our lives. Henceforth we must be everything or nothing to each other. Reflect seriously on what I am about to say. My life has been, as you know, one long period of mortification, brightened only

by the vision of one day paying back into the bosoms of those who injured me the bitterness with which they filled my own. This I could not do simply by amassing wealth—had it been otherwise I should have required no coadjutor in the struggle—but by placing myself on an equality with the noblest and the proudest in the land. My hope rested on you, Ida, on you, so richly gifted by nature, to overcome the last obstacle with which I had to contend. It may now be realised—you have a peer of the realm at your feet,—the coronet of a countess awaiting your acceptance—will you disappoint my hopes? will you compel me to curse the hour in which I trusted to the strength and devotion of a daughter's love?"

The beautiful head of Ida drooped as she listened. She had nerved herself to contend against violence and opposition; she had felt strong in the conviction of her right of free action, and of her privilege to bestow her hand where she had already bestowed her affections; but although her resolution did not waver for an instant, the altered manner of her father sent a pang to her heart, and for a moment rendered her unable to reply. Mr. Trevanion instantly perceived his advantage, and hastened to profit by the impression which he had made.

"You will not do this," he pursued, earnestly; "I feel that you will not by one mad act negative the anticipations of years. Remember, Ida, all that I have been to you. Look around you, and ask yourself if you have hitherto found cause to envy, not merely the fate of those of your own rank in society, but that of others far more highly born. You have been the child of luxury and indulgence; you have never formed a wish which I have not sought to gratify; I have spared nothing—neither gold nor exertion—to fit you for the station which I was resolved that you should attain; and, up to this day, you have seconded me nobly; nor can I believe that you will fail me now."

"I am grateful—most grateful," faltered out his listener.

"And you have cause to be so," continued Mr. Trevanion, overlooking, in his eagerness to compel his daughter's submission to his will, that an open avowal of his motives for the indulgence upon which he dilated must necessarily

weaken his hold upon her feelings; "for, I need scarcely explain to you, who so well understand my nature, that I should never have made such sacrifices had I not an ulterior object in view. I acted in regard to yourself upon the same principle which has regulated every action of my life. Once more I tell you frankly that you have been reared and educated to assist in the prosecution of my one darling scheme: I have watched and waited patiently for the moment in which it should be realised—that moment has come at last, and I look to you to secure me against a failure which would blight my whole after-life."

"And you ask me to further the gratification of a vindictive feeling by the sacrifice of my own hopes of happiness, if, indeed, I understand you rightly," said his daughter, with a heightened colour; "and you seek to impress upon me that I owe the tenderness and care which have been lavished upon me to no affection on your part,—to compel me to feel that I have been regarded less as a child than as a tool which has been gradually tempered to its destined use! Surely, sir, you employ strange arguments to enforce your purpose. Have the talents which you pride yourself on having nurtured, the beauty which you confess has reconciled you to my sex, no higher value in your eyes—in the eyes of a parent, and he the parent of an only child—than any mere base and sordid agent by which you may hope to accomplish your wishes? You have said that it is essential we should understand each other; do we do so now? In pity tell me no! I have so long paid you back every kindness in love and reverence, that I dare not trust myself to think that my affection has been unrequited."

"I shall believe in that affection when I see its fruits," said Mr. Trevanion, coldly; "it is easy to profess a feeling which involves neither sacrifice nor trial; it is only to be trusted when it stands the ordeal of both."

"Thus, then, suffer me to test the depth of yours, my father!" exclaimed his daughter, imploringly; "am I not your child—your only one?—and will you seek for the vain gratification of a vengeance which may after all fail in the attainment of its object, to condemn me to a blighted and loveless existence? Can an alliance with a Lord Downmere,

a man whom, were it not for the mere accident of rank, you would despise, ennoble you in the eyes of your estranged and haughty relatives? Will they not rather scorn you for a weakness which must shame your noble nature?"

"Permit me to be the best judge of the result of my own actions, Miss Trevanion," was the curt rejoinder; "you, in your ignorance of the world, are quite unable to form rational opinion on such a subject. Perhaps, when you find the door of your father closed against you, and are put forth to strive and struggle with the world, as it was once my fate to be, you will be better able to appreciate my feelings. At present your ideas of such a destiny are doubtless vague enough—your romantic notions would probably drape beggary in a tinsel petticoat, and nourish it upon chickens' wings; but I beg to assure you that it is fed and clad far otherwise; and that I owe the privilege of having exchanged its rags and black bread for the comforts of existence, to a resolute will and an indomitable energy. Do not imagine, however, that I have forgotten to whom I was indebted for the chance of failure; or that I will not repay the wrong. If I have been content to wait, it has been because mine was no weak and timid spirit, likely to be scared by difficulties; I know with whom I have to deal; I know that there is one method, and but one, of revenging the cruel injuries which have been heaped upon me. Could I have bowed the pride of my puling uncle or his arrogant wife by gold, I should have needed no coadjutor, and your marriage with a pauper would have been a matter of indifference; but it is not so; and your alliance with this peer, scorn him as you may, is consequently an imperative necessity."

"Hear me in my turn, sir," said his daughter, with calm dignity; "had you been poor, or even dishonoured, and that my self-abnegation, the sacrifice of my whole life, could have restored you to affluence or to honour, I would have placed my fate in your hands without a murmur, too happy to have been thus enabled to repay the debt I owe you; but I will not consent to be made the victim of a chimera—the tool of a caprice. From the moment when you first acquainted me with the intentions of Lord Down-

mere, I frankly told you that he was not merely indifferent, but positively disagreeable to me——”

“But you did not, in your boasted frankness, add that such was the case because you had seen fit to form another attachment,” interposed Mr. Trevanion.

“I did not, because at that time I had come to no resolution on the subject; but even had I decided against Mr. Elphinstone, I should not assuredly have accepted the earl as a substitute; I declare, however, that I was then free, in so far as regarded any pledge or promise to another; for I was well aware, that the suit of Sydney could not be otherwise than unwelcome to yourself, while I was at the same time keenly alive to the apparent risk which I should incur by an union with a man my junior in age; nor was it until I had become conscious that my happiness depended upon this marriage that I could bring myself to incur your displeasure; and I entreat of you to believe that I did so ultimately with a reluctance and regret which have cost me many bitter tears.”

“You will have many still more bitter yet to shed, should you persist in your present insane purpose, Miss Trevanion,” said her father; “for although you have been pleased to designate my legitimate desire to re-integrate myself in society as a ‘chimera,’ and a ‘caprice,’ I beg to assure you, that I will not be thwarted by a whim. Lord Downmere has, you say, left his cause in my hands, and he has done well; for, as your parent, I have a right to enforce your obedience. I am aware that you calculate upon your *legal* power to set my wishes at defiance: I do not dispute it; but you have forgotten to calculate upon the opinion of the world. Are you prepared to encounter its ridicule and its blame? Are you strong enough to spurn its avoidance and its contempt? You are no longer an ignorant and wilful girl, whose folly might be poetised into romance; you have seen enough of society to know that its sympathies will not be enlisted on the side of a woman who has reached her six-and-twentieth year, and who deliberately throws herself away upon a penniless boy.”

“I care little for the opinion of the world, sir,” said Ida, firmly; “I have, as you say, seen and judged it; and I

know, and can fully appreciate, its hollowness. Were that the only difficulty with which I should be called upon to contend, I should not waste one thought upon the subject."

"But, as I need scarcely again inform you, it is by no means the only one," coldly observed the merchant; "although I may be permitted to remark that even were it so, it is not to be dismissed so lightly. Hitherto you have, surrounded by affluence and adulation, found the world a warm and willing friend; you will, in a reverse of fortune, find it a keen and bitter enemy; and one which no woman can defy with impunity; and mark me when I tell you—for I do so advisedly—that you will have to make the trial."

"So be it, then," said Ida, sadly; "I can no longer hesitate. Had you sought to detach me from Mr. Elphinstone by entreaty and affection, I might perchance have yielded—I know not—but it might have been so; now, however, the die is cast, for I were unworthy the love of any honourable man if I could abandon him from mercenary motives. I understand the threat which you have held out—I am to be disinherited. If such be indeed your will, I must submit; I may feel the injustice of the sentence, but I cannot question your right of action."

"That is at least fortunate," observed her father, ironically.

"Nor shall I suffer myself to be dismayed by the prospect," pursued Ida; "it is hard, no doubt, to wrestle single-handed with the world, but in such a strife even defeat is not altogether without honour; our hands, heads, and hearts were bestowed upon us in order that we might be enabled to help ourselves; and the honest struggle for independence has ever an ennobling effect, while the poor tame spirit that is content to remain a burthen upon others at the expense of its best and worthiest feelings, rather than boldly to launch out into the ocean of life, and resolutely to buffet its billows, must necessarily, with its own loss of dignity, incur the contempt of all around it."

"Very eloquently put," said Mr. Trevanion, still in the same accent of sarcasm; "but you must excuse me if I say that your well-rounded periods on this occasion remind me of a coarse daub set in a costly frame; it may be surrounded by glitter, but it remains as worthless as ever. However,

you have explained your determination, and fully understand mine ; we shall shortly see which is of the most avail. You either marry Lord Downmere, or you cease to be my daughter."

"Father—*dear* father!" exclaimed Ida, imploringly.

"Do not exhaust your talents at the commencement of the tragedy, Miss Trevanion," said the merchant ; "I ask for deeds, not words ; and if you decline to prove your affection, I beg of you not to express it. As Countess of Downmere, you are my heiress—as Mrs. Elphinstone, you are without a home in my house."

Ida rose ; her cheek was very pale, and there was a convulsive movement about her mouth, which betrayed the depth of her agony. She leant for an instant upon the table before her, as if unable to support herself, as she turned a long and appealing look upon her father ; but the eyes which met hers were cold and stony ; and after the lapse of a second, Mr. Trevanion with ceremonious politeness threw open the door of the library, and so soon as his daughter had crossed the threshold quietly closed it behind her.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS TREVANION TO MR. ELPHINSTONE.

"I PLEDGED myself to write to you, Sydney, and I redeem my promise. I assured you that I could be firm where our mutual happiness was at stake, and I almost begin to fear that I have been firm even to sin. Nor is this all—for while incurring the displeasure of my father, I have, I fear, rendered our union impossible. Be honest with me, Sydney, and above all be just to yourself, when I tell you that in becoming your wife I cease to be the daughter of Mr. Trevanion. I shall no longer be the petted and pampered heiress, but a disowned and disinherited child, whose poverty can only tend to aggravate your own. I know my father well—such has been his declared decision ; and I am well

aware that even although in secret he may weep tears of blood, he will never rescind it. For myself I care not; for beggary as your wife would be a happier fate for me than the most fabulous affluence with another. Let not that consideration, however, have any weight with you. A woman's home is her world—her ambition does not travel beyond her own hearth; but with your sex it is far otherwise; and you, Sydney, are still very young, too young to sacrifice all your hopes and prospects in life to an affection which—bear with me when I remind you of such a possibility—may one day fail. And even were it to endure through every trial and hardship, yet remember that home-cares and home-anxieties must cripple your exertions and weaken your energies. You were born for a brilliant destiny, and you deserve it. Renounce your claim to my hand; assert yourself, and do justice to the noble talents that you possess. Do not suppose that I say this lightly. In liberating you, I desire no freedom for myself. If I never bear your name, neither will I accept that of any man on earth. My future happiness and pride shall consist in watching your career, in exulting over your success, in praying for your prosperity. Reflect seriously—for the crisis is an awful one to both of us—whether indeed the affection which you have vowed to me has not been, unconsciously to yourself, deepened by the circumstances under which we have hitherto met. You saw me the spoiled child of fortune, whatever beauty I possess heightened by dress, and perfected by art; whatever accomplishments I may have acquired, exerted amid scenes which lent to them a *prestige* not their own. You may have deceived yourself, and how fatal must such an error prove alike to yourself and me! Look beyond the present, Sydney; endeavour to realise that years have passed over us both—years of struggle. You will still be in the full pride of manhood and of hope, competent to struggle with the world, still an object of admiration—a mark for that world's homage. But I, Sydney, what will those years have done for me? Already far before you in the race of life, I shall have reached the turning-point; and withered, changed—I cannot proceed, Sydney—but I can feel the rest! No, no; it must not be—

look on the past as a dream ; have the courage to awaken ; and in after years I shall hear you thank me for your release.
"IDA."

Calmly, and with a steady hand, Miss Trevanion sealed and closed her letter, but her fingers were as cold and bloodless as marble ; and although her eyes were tearless, they were dilated, and the transparent lids hot and discoloured, as though the drops which should have fallen had burnt and blistered there. For a time she sat thrown back upon her chair, with her gaze fastened upon the fateful missive. It contained indeed the destiny of her future life, and she dared not ask herself how it would be answered.

After a while she raised her head, and looked languidly about her ; luxury surrounded her on every side : her glance travelled from silken hangings to gorgeous mirrors—from costly toys to jewelled cabinets and flowers, and birds, and books, and all the other appliances of wealth and taste with which her hitherto indulgent father had delighted to environ her ; and as she noted each in its turn, an expression of loathing passed over her countenance. It was for vanities such as these that she had been urged to barter away her self-respect—to sell her liberty—to perjure her faith—to crush her heart ; and it was from the fear of losing these that she had voluntarily offered to resign Sydney Elphinstone. But no, no ; not from this fear for herself, but for him—and could it be that he would prize them so dearly as to accept her self-abnegation in order to secure them ? Did she not wrong him by suspicion ? And yet who should say ? And then once more arose the fatal thought—"He is so young—the world and all its gauds are still so bright for him. Let him but look into the future, as I have urged, and then——" she did not pursue the anticipation further, but with a convulsive shudder that shook her whole frame, she clasped her spread hands on the table, near which she sat, and buried her throbbing brow in their open palms.

How long she had continued thus motionless in her misery she knew not, when she was aroused by a gentle

knocking at the door of her room, which slowly opened, and Lady Mary Brookland entered, and closed it behind her.

"My dear Ida," said her visitor, as she tenderly approached her, and took a seat by her side, "what is the meaning of this terrible emotion? What has happened?"

"Oh, my kind friend, I am very, very wretched," was the faint reply, as one large scalding tear rolled down the fever-crimsoned cheek of the unhappy girl; "I have just gone through a scene with my father which has nearly destroyed me."

"*Just* gone through such a scene, my sweet child," exclaimed the noble widow; "you have surely had time to compose yourself since the interview took place, for I have myself been closeted with Mr. Trevanion in the library for the last two hours."

"But he has surely not expressed any displeasure towards you?" said Ida, anxiously. "Whatever cause of complaint he may have against myself, you, at least, are guiltless in this affair."

"No, no; apprehend nothing on my account," replied her friend, with proud composure; "Mr. Trevanion is a man of the world, and has sufficient regard for my rank, whatever may be his feelings towards myself personally, to avoid any undue exhibition of temper in our intercourse. On the contrary, throughout the whole of the interview to which I have alluded, nothing could exceed his suavity; and although I detected a certain coldness in his manner which betrayed a suspicion that I felt to be totally undeserved on my part, I refrained from any observation which might tend to show him that I was conscious of the change, feeling that, situated as I am in this family, my rôle should universally be that of a mediator; and as such you are aware that I have universally striven to act."

"I am, indeed, well aware of it, dear Lady Mary," said Miss Trevanion, affectionately, "but as my father appeared to think that you had favoured the addresses of Sydney, and refused to receive my assurance to the contrary, I feared that he might have expressed the same suspicion to yourself."

"That he does so believe, I am convinced," was the quiet rejoinder, "but as I felt that such was not the case, I would not afford him the triumph of perceiving that I considered the suspicion to be possible; for had I done so I could not of course have remained under his roof; and the rather, as you know how utterly unjust it would have been, since I had never been admitted to your confidence, that my advice had never been sought, and that I was, of course, completely ignorant of the engagement between yourself and my nephew."

"It is true that I did not solicit your advice," said Miss Trevanion; "because I felt that had I done so I should have rendered your position one of difficulty and delicacy, from your relationship to Mr. Elphinstone, although I could not doubt that you must have perceived our mutual attachment."

"By no means, my dear girl, by no means," was the ready disclaimer of the lady. "I have now for many years been so accustomed to see you an object of admiration to all by whom you have been approached, that I considered Sydney only as an additional mote sporting in the sunshine of your smiles, or you may rest assured that I should have warned you of the impolicy of such an attachment. It is true that the poor boy is handsome and intellectual, as well as high-born; and, I really believe, truly amiable and honourable; but still he *is* poor, and I therefore imagined it impossible that with all your advantages you would ever dream of making such a sacrifice."

"Surely, dear Lady Mary, you at least should have known me better than to suppose that I could marry for mere wealth or rank."

"Forgive me, Ida, if I have so far done you injustice," was the fond reply of her visitor, as she passed her arm round the waist of Miss Trevanion, and drew her gently to her bosom; "but you must remember that I was fully aware of your father's views and wishes; that I knew him to be absolute in his family; and that from the nature of your education, and your great success in the world, I had every reason to anticipate that you would become the wife of a man of decided rank. How then do you conceive it pro-

bable that I should even for a moment dream of your bestowing yourself upon poor Sydney. Why, my sweet child, much as I am compelled to admire your beautiful disinterestedness, I can even now scarcely bring myself to credit the fact."

"But tell me, my dear friend," said her listener, involuntarily soothed by the placid kindness of her manner, "had I ventured to confide the truth to you, should you have blamed me for my love of Sydney?"

"Blamed you, darling? No, I should not certainly have had the heart to blame your unselfish generosity; but still I should have felt it my duty to discourage the attachment as one which could not fail to excite the displeasure of your father, who had, as you must yourself admit, every right to be ambitious for such a daughter; and even now my errand is to dissuade you from persisting in this unpropitious engagement."

"At my father's request?" asked Ida.

"Yes, love, at Mr. Trevanion's request, who appears to place great faith in my influence, far greater than I fear it deserves. He has strenuously urged me to exert all my eloquence in pointing out what he considers as the madness and folly of such a marriage, and you see that I am conscientiously doing so. He moreover requested me to represent the policy and propriety of your union with Lord Downmere; and it must be confessed, Ida, that, in a worldly point of view, there can be no comparison between the two."

"Is Lord Downmere the husband you would have selected for me, Lady Mary?"

"Perhaps not, dearest, perhaps not precisely; but he is, you know, as a peer of the realm and a man of enormous wealth, a very desirable match. There can be no doubt that you can do much worse."

"I scarcely think it possible," said Miss Trevanion, with a shade of haughtiness; "that is, however, a point which we need not discuss, as it is one upon which my mind is unalterably decided. Happen what may, I will never become Countess of Downmere; I should despise myself, could I be mercenary enough to barter my happiness for such considerations to such a man."

"Well, my love, you know best, of course; while it is quite certain, that if you have really resolved to give your hand to my nephew—if you really feel that he possesses your affections—we can only hope that Mr. Trevanion will, after a time, become reconciled to the marriage. Still I must, as I have promised, caution you that all your friends will regard it as an imprudence. But if you feel that your happiness depends on him, I actually have not the courage to distress you by any further arguments. Indeed, under the peculiar circumstances, I almost feel it a treason against Sydney to say another word upon the subject; for I cannot forget that he is my sister's son, and that he is, moreover, a man of whose alliance any father might be proud. However, I must not suffer the affections of a relative to seduce me into a failure against friendship, and I am anxious to be able to assure Mr. Trevanion that I have performed my onerous mission faithfully."

"Of any after-reconciliation with my father, when I have once become the wife of Sydney, I am utterly hopeless," said Ida, sadly; "I know that once to have incurred his anger and thwarted his will, is to have forfeited his affection for ever. No, he will never forgive me."

"Nonsense, silly child," exclaimed Lady Mary Brookland, laughingly. "Do you forget that your father is a wealthy man, and that you are his only child, and must consequently one day inherit that wealth? Do you suppose that, after having throughout life exerted all his energies to make his daughter a mark for the admiration and envy of the world, he will long permit his affections to be alienated from the idol which he has himself set up? No, no; trust me, he will desire to see his ample fortune produce its legitimate effect, and for that purpose, if for no other, you are certain of forgiveness."

"I cannot entertain any such hope, my good friend," sighed Miss Trevanion; "I do not seek to do so for a moment, as I feel convinced that ultimate disappointment must ensue. My father, with all his noble qualities, never forgives—he is truth itself—and he has assured me that in the event of my disobedience, he will bequeath every shilling of which he is possessed to the son of Sir Jasper."

Her companion visibly started. "You know him well, my dear Lady Mary," she pursued; "and therefore you will readily understand that he will fulfil his word; while I do not hesitate to confess that, bitterly as I feel, and ever shall feel, his displeasure and his estrangement, the thought that instead, as I had fondly hoped, of enriching Sydney, and of affording him the opportunity of displaying his brilliant talents with the effect that they deserve, I shall go to him helpless and almost penniless, and thus increase his struggle with the world, is yet more painful."

Lady Mary remained silent for a moment, and then said, in a constrained tone, very different from that in which she had hitherto carried on the conversation, "I can well believe it, my dear, for in the present factitious state of society, it is impossible for any individual to do justice to himself, however highly gifted he may be by nature, unless he has the means of improving his advantages. I do not for a moment suspect Sydney of any mercenary views; indeed I believe him to be incapable of such considerations, particularly when *you* are the object of his affections; but still the imprudence of undertaking the responsibility of a family under such circumstances will, undoubtedly, be very great; nor, my love, must you be hurt if I venture to remind you that this imprudence will be considerably increased by the disparity of age which exists between you. You will, as I before urged upon you, really do well to reflect before you decide; as these particulars may not have struck you before, I considered it my imperative duty to point them out."

"Pardon me, madam," said Miss Trevanion, haughtily, as she rose with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye. "I am not the heartless egotist you think me. I have considered all and more of the difficulties which a marriage with me might entail upon Mr. Elphinstone than even you have enumerated. Nor have I simply grieved over them in selfish sorrow; there—" and as she spoke she pointed towards the letter which still lay upon her desk—"there, I have forced them upon the attention of your nephew himself—there, I have urged him to consider them as insurmountable, and to resign his claim upon my hand. If I am fated to a life of suffering, I am at least willing to suffer alone."

"You are warm, Ida!"

"Perhaps so," said Miss Trevanion, as she sank back into her seat; "but you must pardon me—it is hard, very hard, to be abandoned by all in whom you have trusted; but I thank you, Lady Mary, for having kept me no longer in suspense as to the support I might expect from your affection. You have indeed complied even to the very letter with the request of my father—your mission has been fulfilled as conscientiously as you could desire; and now I have but one request to make of you, and I make it unhesitatingly, as it cannot by any possibility involve your interests. Should Mr. Elphinstone, your nephew, after having received that letter, persevere in seeking the disinherited daughter of Mr. Trevanion as his wife, it is more than possible that Lady Mary Brookland may be solicited still to remain his guest, and to do the honours of his house—and oh! if indeed it should be so," she added, as her voice sank and her lip quivered, "be kind to my poor mother, I shall not be there to support her weakness, and to conceal from her the isolation of her neglected and wasted existence—and believe me that, careless as he may appear of her happiness, my father will, in his heart, thank you for the care of her."

"Miss Trevanion, I do not understand you," faltered Lady Mary.

"No—you are right, you do not understand me," was the reply; "but you may one day do so: meanwhile, this interview has ceased to be pleasant to either party, and I will not detain you longer."

"Ida, your impetuous feelings will be your ruin," said her companion, harshly.

"It may be so," murmured the unhappy girl, despondently; "it may be so: at present I am only the victim of the passions of others."

"What am I to say to your father, Miss Trevanion?" asked Lady Mary, as she rose to depart.

"Tell him all that has passed between us," was the indignant rejoinder; "I have no cause to shrink from one word that I have uttered, I have no intention to retract it."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XII.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

Miss Trevanion was now, indeed, as she had said, alone. To her mother she knew that it was vain to cling for counsel or support, for the poor lady had been so long self-centred, and crushed beneath the iron hand of her husband, that her heart was dead to sympathy, and engrossed by its own petty feelings of discontent. The marriage from which she had anticipated alike honour and happiness had been a mere gilded slavery, and she had worn her chains with a passiveness which had gradually but surely benumbed all the most generous qualities of her nature, and so broken her spirits that the only enjoyment of which she was still susceptible was that of perfect quiet ; every event that tended to interrupt it being regarded as a personal and wilful injury. Weak, as we have already shown, both intellectually and morally, a neglected if not vicious education had caused her greatly to overrate mere worldly advantages ; a meanness of mind which had been fostered in after-life by the puerile course of novel-reading in which she delighted ; and although it is probable that had she been permitted to perform the part of a mother to her child, and to exercise the privileges of the maternal character, that sacred tie might have awakened her to holier and higher feelings, the fact of her having seen her legitimate duties delegated to another, had caused her to regard her daughter rather as the heiress of Mr. Trevanion, than as one upon whose love she had a claim, and whose happiness she was bound to promote. Awed by the rank of Lady Mary Brookland, it never occurred to her on the first domestication of the titled stranger beneath her roof, to contest her own right, or to assert her own dignity ; while as Ida passed from infancy to girlhood she had looked with bewildered surprise upon the bright and beautiful being whose talents were the theme of every tongue.

Even the affection which was lavished upon her by the brilliant girl, who never for an instant suffered the indulgence of which she was the object to induce her to fail in respect or assiduity to her neglected mother, could not lessen the estrangement. Mrs. Trevanion was vaguely conscious of their utter incompatibility of mind and feeling; and thus by slow but inevitable degrees, a barrier had grown up between them which neither could ultimately overpass. In her secret heart, the childish and vapid woman felt herself wronged by the superior qualities of her own child, and consequently met all her advances with querulous discontent, if not with actual distaste; yet still her daughter, with the persistence of a generous nature, even while she was compelled to admit to herself that she had little respect for her mother's judgment or understanding, continued to act as though she possessed the firmest faith in both.

In such a crisis as the present, however, Miss Trevanion at once felt that it would be idle to make any appeal to her; for even as she had herself become the wife of Mr. Trevanion in the weak hope of attaining to a rank in society superior to that in which she was born, so was she comparatively angered and annoyed by the refusal of her daughter to accomplish a marriage which would have made her the mother-in-law of an earl. Like her husband himself, but from a far different motive, she cared little what might be the qualifications of the individual through whose agency this desirable object was to be effected; she merely fastened upon the fact of its possibility, nor could she control her irritation at what she denounced as the obstinacy of Ida, when, to her extreme amazement, she learned that not even the commands of her father could induce her to accept the hand of a peer of the realm.

"It is really too bad, Lady Mary," she said, peevishly; "a great deal too bad, and using me extremely ill, when she knows how much I wish it. What can she possibly want, I wonder! I'm sure if Mr. Trevanion is satisfied, she has no right to look higher.

"I quite agree with you in that opinion, madam," replied the titled dowager, with a quiet sneer; "there can be no

doubt that even Miss Trevanion should be satisfied with the rank of the Earl of Downmere ; that is not, of course, her objection."

"Then what can it possibly be?" asked the lady, vacantly.

"I should presume that it is to Lord Downmere himself."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion, with more energy than she had exhibited for years; "I see nothing objectionable in him; and even if there were, what can it signify?"

Her companion shrugged her shoulders, and remained silent.

"I am sure," pursued the mortified mother, with unusual garrulity, "that I was not at all in love with Mr. Trevanion when I married him; for, to tell you the truth, he always frightened me, he was so cold and proud; but when he told me of his uncle Sir Jasper, and Trevanion Hall, and his poor dear mother, who was, like yourself, an earl's daughter, I felt at once that I was never likely to do better; and so, you see, I consented to be his wife."

"A resolution, madam, which I trust that you have never had reason to repent," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"Well, I don't know exactly; I am not quite certain," said the poor lady, musingly; "I sometimes fancy, and particularly since I have become convinced that Mr. Trevanion's great relations are never likely to be reconciled to him, that we were not altogether suited to each other; and that I might perhaps have been happier had I married John George Harris, my father's head-clerk, who nearly went out of his mind when he found that I had engaged myself to 'the Don,' as they called my present husband in the office."

"It is possible," said Lady Mary, "that some similar idea may have struck your daughter, and that she may have acted upon it."

"If I thought so——" commenced Mrs. Trevanion, then suddenly checking herself, and turning towards her companion, she added, with what she evidently intended to be an accent of severity, "at all events, Lady Mary, I believe she has more good sense than to think in earnest of throwing herself away upon your nephew."

No; Miss Trevanion was right; she could anticipate **neither counsel nor comfort in her trial from such a mother.**

Thus then there was but one individual to whom she had looked for sympathy and support, and that one was Lady Mary Brookland, the near relative of the man on whom she had consented to bestow her hand ; the attached friend who had been the guardian of her girlhood and the companion of her riper years ; by whom her attachment had been, if not openly applauded, at least covertly encouraged, and even this last stay had failed her at the very moment when she had placed the firmest faith in its stability—failed her because what her haughty and calculating ladyship had coveted for her nephew was, not the heart of the loving girl who had for years clung to her as to a second mother, but the hand of Mr. Trevanion's heiress.

This was a bitter conviction ; and as it grew upon her, a stronger feeling of desolation crept over the affrighted Ida. "*He too*," she murmured to herself, "*he too*, will now perhaps become suddenly aware of the imprudence which he was lately so anxious to commit—he may discover in our disparity of age, which he has hitherto treated so lightly, an obstacle and a ridicule. I am prepared for everything ; deserted on all sides, I must learn to suffice to myself, and I will do so. They may destroy my happiness, but they shall not bow my pride. My heart may break—it must—but I will ask no pity ; I will submit to none. I am no weak girl to be a mark for the whispers of the idle ; my father's spirit of endurance is strong within me ; and like the Spartan boy I shall know how to hug my agony without a groan. And yet how I had garnered up my heart in him—how madly I had loved him, and love him still ; the better, perhaps, that I thought he would owe all to me. It cannot be that Sydney will prove hollow and heartless like his worldly aunt ; but should it indeed be so, better now than after I had become his wife, for now I would struggle to forgive ; while then—" and she paused and grasped her burning brow so tightly that it grew pale beneath the pressure,—"*then I should have scorned to make the effort ; never would I have forgiven him had he pleaded to me upon his knees. And it might have been so—yes, yes, it might have been so ; in some ten short years, and how quietly would those ten years pass, my boasted beauty will be on the wane, and the world will be*

full of young and blooming faces, fair and fresh, with the first light of life bright upon them—and how then? Would he, still in the unfaded glory of his manhood, remain true to me—true to himself? I dare not doubt it—for his sake—I dare not for my own. Now I am wretched, but not guilty—but then—then what would not his falsehood make me? Lady Mary is right. I have forgotten my own sense of dignity—I have been the victim of my own vanity—he will do well to rebuke my folly by submitting to her judgment, by following her counsels. I shall at least be spared the pang of his neglect, and the bitterness of his contempt!”

Worn with excitement, and crushed by mortification and anxiety, the painful picture which the jealous imagination of the excited girl had conjured up, overcame her little remaining strength; and when her French maid entered her room an hour subsequently, she found her stretched upon a sofa, cold and insensible; nor was it until after a considerable time, and the application of all the restoratives within reach, that she slowly recovered her consciousness.

As she did so, the first object upon which her eyes fastened was a letter, and the *femme-de-chambre* no sooner perceived that it had attracted her attention than she placed it in her hand. Mademoiselle Seraphine was enchanted. In one instant she had composed a most touching romance. Her haughty mistress must now confide in her; and her little black eyes would twinkle in spite of herself as she decided that her assistance must at last be needed, and her talents recognised. Eagerly did she watch the effect of her ready zeal; but her hopes were destined to disappointment; the letter was no sooner in the possession of Miss Trevanion than one glance sufficed; it was the handwriting of Sydney; and faintly murmuring, “Leave me,” the agitated girl closed her eyes and fell back upon the cushions, with the fateful packet tightly grasped within her rigid fingers. For awhile she remained motionless, not a sob, not a sigh escaped her, but her heart laboured painfully, and her pulses throbbed with an excitement strangely compounded of hope and dread. Her destiny lay hidden within the narrow folds of the paper that she held, and she had not courage to learn its secret. But suddenly she started from her recumbent position, sh

back the masses of her dark hair, and with febrile energy tore open the seal.

Thus ran the letter :—

“I know not, Ida, whether to be pained or rejoiced at the tone of the note which I have just received from you ; for while much of its contents is calculated to cut me to the heart, it also contains much which has made me supremely happy. That you should have been subjected to so severe a trial of your feelings is to me a source of wretchedness greater than even you can comprehend ; but you must not blame me if I confess that the conviction, that you willingly endured it for my sake, has almost made me selfish enough to forget at times how dearly my own triumph has been purchased. Mine is no common love, Ida ; it has become part and parcel of my existence. I feel that I cannot live without you, and that with you I could brave every trial which the tyranny of the world could heap upon me. You say that should you persist in fulfilling your promise to become my wife you lose all claim to the affection and inheritance of your father ; proudly then shall I feel that you will owe all to me—that we shall be everything to each other. This, dearest, is my idea of happiness ; I am young alike in years and hope ; my energies are strong, and with you beside me to cheer me in my labour, and to rejoice in my success, I cannot fail. I will *not* resign my claim to possess you ; you have promised, and you must perform. And yet, may I not, in my miserable egotism, be condemning you to sacrifices so great that even my tenderness cannot require them ? Oh, if it indeed be so, let me not drag you down from the proud eminence on which you stand, only to ensure my own happiness. Like you, I will strive to be generous—to exult in your prosperity, in your success—I know not if I shall have strength to do so, but I will try, even though my heart burst in the effort. Care not for me, however, if, on mature reflection, you find that you shrink from the contrast between what is and what must be, when you can no longer command the luxuries by which you are now surrounded—if you doubt that my love and devotion—a love and a devotion which can end only in the grave—will not suffice to replace them. I cannot now offer you affluence—I may not be en-

abled to do so for years to come—can you forego it for my sake? If so, trust me that it will come at last. Labouring with you, and for you, I shall compel success—you will be my life, my light, and my reward. I make no comment upon the fears which you express that time can weaken my affections; it is true that when we first met, it was your wondrous beauty by which I was thrall'd, and that beauty will live unchanged in my heart for ever; while all your nobler and better qualities will only tend, as years pass on, to render you still dearer. Should we part, therefore, Ida, the ruin of our hopes will be your work; for never, never will I willingly resign the claim which you have given me upon your hand. I may be unworthy of such a boon in the eyes of those around you, but am I so in yours? It is for you, and you alone, to decide my destiny. I urge you now as I should not have dared to do had you still been enabled to become mine, rich in the world's gifts; for then indeed my earnestness might have been misinterpreted; but now, when you assure me that it is not so, I may freely own that life itself will be a burthen when you are lost to me. I have never loved another; and now my heart is so filled with your image that it can never admit a new one. Let your beauty wane; to me you will be ever beautiful beyond all on this earth; let sickness wither you, I will render that suffering light by my tenderness and devotion; and if sorrow should reach you even in my arms, I will only clasp you the closer that its bitter pressure may not be felt. Ida, noblest, best of women, torture me no longer, tell me only that you are still mine—mine for time—mine for eternity.

“SYDNEY.”

“Yes, my brave-hearted Sydney, yes,” exclaimed Miss Trevanion, vehemently throwing herself upon her knees, “yours, and only yours—yours for time—yours for eternity. I cannot, and I will not doubt you. Years will not change you; poverty will not chill you. You will love me to the end. What are the gaud and glitter of the world beside the possession of such a heart as yours? And I have dared to wrong your noble nature—to believe that the cold reasonings of the selfish and false could shake your stedfast faith.

Shame on my sordid spirit ! But I can never doubt you more. I will be worthy of your affection by the trustfulness with which I will repose upon its truth and strength. Oh, I am happy—happy—even as the mariner who in his storm-tossed vessel sees a safe harbour near, and knows that after one more fierce struggle, he shall gain the wished-for haven of peace and rest.”

When Miss Trevanion rose from her knees, she was no longer pale from exhaustion, and subdued by the long-sustained anxiety which had so lately crushed her ; there was a proud light in her eye, and a firmness in her tread, which betrayed her inward exultation. The anger of her father, the treachery of her friend, all was forgotten in that moment of triumphant happiness. Sydney was true—Sydney was all, and more than she had dared to hope—and she had no room for any other memory. Again and again she read the letter which she still held tightly clasped, and again and again the smile of the heart's gladness played upon her lip. She drew aside the window-drapery, and threw back the sash, as if to breathe more freely, to have more scope for her joy, more space for her intense and thrilling rapture ; and never had she thought the sky so glorious in its blue and tranquil beauty, the trees so graceful nor the flowers so rich in colour and in perfume. “Of these, at least, even poverty cannot deprive us,” she murmured to herself, “we shall need no gold to purchase these. Nature is no niggard of her gifts, and she will not withhold her treasures from the hearts by which she is worshipped. The future cannot extort a sigh from me now, nor will I even shrink from the present.”

True to this resolution, Miss Trevanion summoned her maid, and calmly devoted herself to the duties of her toilette : every vestige of emotion had faded from her features, and a soft serenity had succeeded the storm of passion to which she had so lately yielded ; extreme in all her feelings, she now dwelt only upon the happiness which was, as she fondly believed, so soon to repay her for all the suffering of the past ; and as she rejected one after the other the ornaments with which her zealous *femme-de-chambre* was anxious to adorn her according to her usual custom, and placed in her

luxuriant hair, and in the girdle of her simple dress of snowy muslin, a few natural flowers from a vase which stood upon her dressing-table, she smiled exultingly as she became aware that Sydney could scarcely consider her less lovely thus, than when covered with the costly gems with which she must henceforth dispense.

The astonished French woman looked on in silence. That her beautiful young mistress, who, she had every reason to believe, was betrothed to an earl, should suddenly so far forget her dignity as to throw aside her jewels for a handful of paltry flowers, was to her mysterious and annoying in the extreme. What could it mean? And the pale face, which had so terrified her only a few hours previously, and which was now beaming with a quiet joy—that was another problem. Mademoiselle Seraphine was convinced that there was a secret somewhere; and never before had she felt so indignant at the proud reserve which led Miss Trevanion habitually to avoid all unnecessary intercourse with her attendants. The smart *soubrette* would have willingly given a year's wages, which would have been no slight sacrifice, could she have dived into the depths of the heart which was beating so tranquilly beside her, but she dared not ask a question; and consequently she flitted and fluttered about the apartment with the indignant air of a grievously-offended person, occasionally murmuring beneath her breath certain doubts as to how far '*Milord*' might approve of the sudden '*caprice*' of his incomprehensible '*fiancée*'—wondering how long this fit of '*coquetterie maladroite et mal entendue*' was to last; and inquiring of herself whether she ought to condescend to live with a mistress who appeared to be steeped in grief one hour, and as happy as a child the next—who preferred rose-buds to rubies, and, worse than all, kept her own secrets.

Upon the object of her speculations, however, all this display of irritation was wholly wasted; Ida was living that inner life which deadens the perceptions to outward things, and she finally dismissed mademoiselle without the least regard for her injured feelings, in order that she might enjoy in solitude the thick-coming thoughts which crowded upon her heart and brain, and without one suspicion that had not

the ill-used woman anticipated a *noce*, and the glory of arranging the bridal coronal of *Madame la Comtesse*, she would, in the exasperation of the moment, have given her warning on the spot.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAMILY FRIEND.

WHILE Miss Trevanion was occupied with her new and pleasant visions, her father was moodily pacing the library where he was closeted with the family friend ; who, although she had told the tale of Ida's resolute rejection of the earl, and her equally determined adherence to Mr. Elphinstone, in her smoothest and blandest manner, had nevertheless raised a storm in the breast of her host which it required all his self-control to combat. The placid smile and studied phrases of Lady Mary jarred upon his nerves, contrasting as they did with the irritation of his own feelings ; and as she sat playing with a paper-cutter as calmly as though no subject of importance occupied her thoughts, he inwardly cursed the high-breeding which had hitherto been the theme of his admiration.

"I believe that nothing would ruffle her," he murmured to himself, "nothing, so long as she was secure of a home under my roof ; and I believe too that this affair has been her own work ; and that, in spite of Ida's denial, she forced her beggarly nephew upon the girl for the very purpose that she has accomplished. No, no, my Lady Mary, I am not your dupe, as you imagine ; I see through the whole plot ; but I will circumvent you yet. I will not be fooled with impunity. I will compel you to act for me, and with me, although as yet you have declined to express your own sentiments upon the subject. But I must be calm ; and I will."

And in pursuance of this resolution Mr. Trevanion re-seated himself, and smoothed his ruffled brow.

"Ida assures me, Lady Mary," he commenced, abruptly, "that you were altogether ignorant of the imprudent engagement into which she has entered with Mr. Elphinstone. Is this really the case?"

"It is."

"But may I ask if it was quite unexpected on your part?"

"Perfectly so; the age of my nephew, and the narrowness of his means, alike rendered it impossible that I could indulge in any idea of the sort."

"And no wonder, madam, coupled as these circumstances were, moreover, by your knowledge of my views and intentions for Miss Trevanion,—whom,—I now tell you, as I have done frequently before,—I would rather follow her to her grave than permit her to throw herself away upon a nobody."

"I must be permitted to remark," observed the lady, with a stateliness of manner intended to reprove the arrogance of her companion, "that Mr. Elphinstone is at once highly born and well-connected. The equal at least in that respect, even of Miss Trevanion."

A dark cloud gathered on the countenance of the merchant.

"I do not deny it, madam," he said, coldly; "as your relative the gentleman has assuredly that qualification, but still I must be pardoned if I persist in considering him as a nobody. He has no stake in the country. He has even a reputation to make; he is known only by a certain set as 'a man about town,' well-looking and well-dressed; and so obscure an individual can never be the husband of my daughter."

Lady Mary replied only by a listless bow, and having been engaged for the last few minutes in cutting some coloured paper into narrow strips, she now began to amuse herself by twisting them into spools.

Nothing could be more aggravating to a proud and impetuous nature like that of Mr. Trevanion, than this assumption of perfect composure. His blood rose to fever heat, and his temples throbbed almost to pain.

"I trust, madam," he said, after a moment's silence,

"that you did me the favour to explain to my rebellious child that I peremptorily insisted upon her accepting the hand of Lord Downmere?"

"I did, with the same frankness that I communicated to yourself her equally peremptory refusal."

"And do you not yourself—now, Lady Mary, I put the question to you in the full conviction that you will answer it frankly and undisguisedly, even although you chance to be the kinswoman of Mr. Elphinstone,—do you not, as a woman of the world, consider that her marriage with that gentleman would be to the last degree imprudent?"

"Since you compel me to declare my opinion, Mr. Trevanion," said the noble matron, "I most assuredly do."

"I am happy to hear it—very happy," exclaimed the merchant; "and may I hope that you expressed as much to my daughter?"

"I did."

"My dear madam," said Mr. Trevanion, earnestly, "I regret to say that I have wronged you by supposing that you had at least encouraged Ida's infatuation by your silence; I should have known you better than to suspect, even for a moment, that you could be guilty of such monstrous disingenuousness; but if you now, with your usual admirable judgment, disapprove of my daughter's folly, what will be your opinion when I confide to you that I have positively assured her, that, in the event of her persistence, not one shilling of my property shall ever be hers?"

"What *can* I think, my dear sir," smiled the lady; "but that you held forth a threat, which you would never have the courage to realise."

"You mistake me," was the stern rejoinder; "I shall fulfil it without an effort."

The strip of pink paper upon which Lady Mary Brookland was at that instant engaged, visibly quivered in her fingers: "Remember," she said, in a somewhat unsteady tone, "that Ida is your only child."

"I do," replied the merchant; "but I remember also that I have a nephew; one moreover who bears my name, and will be no obscure recipient of my bounty. If I cannot humble Sir Jasper in the way which I had every right to

hope that I should have done, I can still, at least, effect my purpose by crushing him beneath the weight of an obligation which he can never cancel."

"Still, my good friend," urged the lady, discontinuing her employment, and evincing infinitely more interest in the conversation than she had hitherto done, "still I would plead for Ida. Recollect the nature of her education, and how little it has fitted her for a life of privation and struggle. Do not overlook the fact that she has done more than justice to your expectations; that her beauty, her grace, and her attainments have made her universally popular, and caused her society to be courted by persons of exalted rank and acknowledged judgment. In short, do not suffer your own—I confess very legitimate—disappointment, to render you ungenerous or unjust."

"Miss Trevanion has seen fit to emancipate herself from my authority, madam," was the dogged reply, "and I most sincerely congratulate her on the fact that her godmother bequeathed to her the magnificent sum of three hundred pounds a-year, as she will, should she become Mrs. Elphinstone, have an admirable opportunity of testing the capabilities of such an income; while I equally congratulate myself upon the circumstance, as I could not conscientiously have left her to starve."

"Mr. Trevanion," persisted the lady, "do nothing rashly, lest you incur the misery of your own reproaches."

"I will run the risk of any remorse likely to be awakened by my assertion of self-respect, madam."

"But the world, sir—you would surely not desire to brave the comments of the world; and believe me when I assure you, that public opinion will condemn so unprecedented an act of severity."

"I will venture even that," said the merchant. "When once the dream of my life is past, the world and myself will have little in common. I ask nothing of it; I owe nothing to it; I have been the architect of my own fortunes, and the edifice that I have raised is substantial enough for me to trust to its stability"

"Consider, nevertheless," resumed his companion, as she laid her jewelled hand lightly upon his arm, and looked

pleadingly into his face, "do not, I entreat, suffer it to escape you, that by renouncing the interests, and—if I understand you rightly—the society of your daughter, you also tear asunder the holy bonds which knit together a mother and her child.—No, no; you cannot have the heart to do this."

"You are an able advocate, Lady Mary," was the rejoinder, as a questionable smile played about the mouth of Mr. Trevanion, "but unfortunately for the success of your argument, we are both sufficiently conversant with the *dessous des cartes* to be quite aware that the bonds to which you allude hang somewhat loosely in this instance. The mother will easily console herself with a new shawl and a new novel; while the daughter, whose temperament and training must years ago have taught her that the lady in question is merely a harmless simpleton, to whom she is indebted for nothing beyond the single fact of her existence, will find little difficulty in reconciling herself to the privation of a very negative advantage. These are, however, idle speculations, as I still hope—and moreover, expect—to see Miss Trevanion Countess of Downmere."

"I sincerely trust, should the resolution which you have declared be really unalterable, that your expectations may be realised," said Lady Mary, as she once more busied herself with the shreds of pink paper, "for I shall be truly gratified on vacating my place at your hospitable hearth, to feel that you have not been disappointed in your hopes."

"I do not understand you, my dear madam," said the merchant.

"And yet nothing can be more simple than my meaning," replied his companion, with a sigh that was only just audible enough to imply that she had failed in her effort to suppress it. "Let my sweet friend bestow her hand upon whom she may, my mission in your family is necessarily at an end; and although I shall, as you must be well aware, deeply and keenly feel my separation from a circle endeared to me alike by sympathy and habit, still——"

"And do you really mean me to infer, my dear Lady Mary," asked the merchant, earnestly, "that you contemplate such a separation? and that because my daughter, in

the natural course of events, leaves her home, you will also abandon the roof which you have so kindly regarded as your own?"

"In my turn I ask, can you be serious, Mr. Trevanion?"

"Perfectly so," was the calm reply; "you know precisely, my dear madam, how I am situated; and that after the departure of Ida, be it to Woodlyn Castle or to a suburban lodging, there will be no longer a mistress of my house, should you indeed fail me? Nay, don't talk to me of Mrs. Trevanion: she exists, and nothing more. To you alone can I look for companionship and help; and I trust that our long friendship gives me some claim upon your consideration."

"My position, under such circumstances, would be an onerous one," remarked the lady.

"Pardon me if I cannot see it in that light. You have now been my guest, my honoured guest, for years; the tie between us has become stronger than that of kindred; I must induce you to rescind your resolution."

Lady Mary was an excellent actress, and on this occasion she put forth all her talent. Although the idea of leaving the luxurious home of which she had for so long a period been the actual if not the nominal mistress, had caused her many an unquiet moment, she was by no means inclined to avow the truth, when by gratifying the secret wish of her own heart she might seem to concede a favour; and she consequently adduced a multitude of arguments against the proposed arrangement, although none of them were powerful enough to defy refutation; and even while she was eager to yield, and thus to secure to herself the advantages she had so long enjoyed, she refused to pledge herself to anything; there was so much to consider; circumstances might arise to render her determination imperative; she was, of course, both gratified and flattered by so unequivocal a proof of regard on the part of Mr. Trevanion, but the point was a delicate one, a very delicate one. She would not, however, positively refuse, because there was nothing on earth which she should regret so much as to wound the feelings of so old and esteemed a friend; but at the same time she must request to be allowed the oppor-

tunity of turning the matter over in her mind. Nothing could be more reasonable; and as her companion entertained a shrewd doubt of her ultimately proving inexorable, he instantly complied with the very natural suggestion. He did not seek to be importunate, although he should await her decision with anxiety; and thus the question was left in abeyance for the time. Mr. Trevanion readily perceived, however, that it had been mooted at an auspicious moment, for a quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he discovered that the certainty of her own impunity in any and every case had singularly tended to modify the noble matron's sentiments on the subject of his contemplated severity to his daughter. She reluctantly agreed, but she *did* agree, that he had a right to be disappointed by the pertinacity of Ida—that he was entitled to compel her obedience—that the Earl of Downmere was in every respect the most eligible husband that he could have selected for her—and that the “love-affair” was a mere folly, which ought to be discountenanced on every account.

“And now that you have compelled me to speak plainly, my good sir,” she resumed, “although I assure you that I had resolved to do nothing of the kind, you may appreciate the difficulty of the position in which I was placed. Sydney Elphinstone is my nephew, and at first I feared (as you are aware, with some justice) that you might possibly so far mistake me as to believe that I should countenance his suit from interested motives; while, after you had informed me of your intention of adopting and enriching your nephew, should your wishes be disregarded, I became equally apprehensive that I might appear to abandon the cause of my own, because Ida could no longer enrich him with the noble fortune to which she had expected to succeed. Now, however, that we thoroughly understand each other, there is no longer any reason why I should shrink from acknowledging that I have, from the moment in which it was confided to me, considered the whole affair as childish and absurd in the extreme. Sydney is a fine young fellow, but he is still a mere boy, who can scarcely be supposed to know his own mind; while Miss Trevanion——”

“Is a woman of six-and-twenty, who is as ready to make

a fool of herself as any boarding-school miss of fifteen," broke in the merchant, with a portentous frown; "and who must consequently be treated as such. I will see Lord Downmere to-morrow. Fortunately, he has no false delicacy on the subject, and, moreover, knows nothing about the Elphinstone affair; so that in-so far as he is concerned, there is no harm done; and after I shall have seen his lordship I will lose no more time in making my final arrangements, in which, my dear Lady Mary, I shall rely on your assistance and advice."

"You know how sincerely both will be afforded, my good sir," said his companion, with dignified suavity; "while I, on my part, am convinced that you will ask nothing from me inconsistent with the tender affection which I feel for my sweet young friend."

"Of that you need have no apprehension," was the rejoinder of the merchant; "for that very affection must, as a natural consequence, lead you to desire her prosperity and happiness. The path is therefore plain before us, and we have only to follow it steadily and resolutely. And now, *sans adieu*, my dear Lady Mary; I fear that, in my inconsiderate egotism, I may already have detained you too long."

The lady rose with a polite disclaimer on her lips; and then, having carefully collected her scattered treasures, and playfully enriched the silver standish of the master of the house with a portion of her rose-coloured labours, she smilingly took her departure. Come what might, she had carried her own point.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INTERVIEW.

HENRY FERDINAND, Earl of Downmere, and Baron Woodlyn, had, as we have already shown, no very overpowering passion for the beautiful Miss Trevanion; although he was by no means insensible to the fact that, with her many graces and attractions, she could not but do honour to his name and rank. His pertinacity in the pursuit of the lady was prompted by other, and to him more serious, considerations. His lordship had throughout life restricted his worship to one idol, and that idol had been self; while so zealous had been his devotion, that his large income had gradually failed to meet the demands made upon it by one, who was at once a profligate and a sybarite. More than one of his estates was deeply mortgaged, and this fact not only crippled his resources, but jarred upon his pride; and he accordingly looked to the money-bags of the wealthy Mr. Trevanion for release; nor did the unpleasant and mortifying circumstance of his rejection by sundry well-dowried beauties to whom he had previously offered the privilege of relieving him from his embarrassments, tend to weaken his anxiety for success in the present instance. He was deterred by no false delicacy in his pursuit of a woman to whom his addresses were unwelcome, for his past associations with the sex had not initiated him into the shrinking sensitiveness of its purer and better portion. Recognising no dignity save that of title, he looked upon the marriage which he now contemplated, as a fair and equitable barter. He needed the princely fortune of the heiress to enable him to terminate his life as he had commenced it, in self-indulgence and display; while he was content to give in exchange a name which he had done nothing to illustrate, and a rank which he had done nothing to adorn.

Nevertheless, there were moments in which the haughty

and self-centred man brought himself to believe that in bestowing his hand upon the high-bred and fascinating daughter of Mr. Trevanion, he was about to make a heavy sacrifice; nor were his private reflections more flattering to Mr. Trevanion personally. That the courtly and dignified merchant desired the alliance for his own sake, the peer did not believe, for he had wit enough to perceive at once that their several natures were not merely incompatible, but even antagonistic both in principle and feeling. "No, no," would the earl murmur to himself, with a saturnine smile, as he shook his gouty leg, and swallowed an olive to relish more keenly his penultimate glass of claret; "No, no, the old fellow cannot deceive me, bland and smooth as he is; he wants a lift up on the social ladder, and is willing to pay handsomely, provided the stride be a long one, but perhaps it is better so; I am not anxious to marry the whole family."

And Lord Downmere was right; Mr. Trevanion had never for a moment cheated himself into a belief that he was working for the happiness of his daughter in forcing forward her union with the selfish egotist who was to raise her to the peerage; his motive stood bare and unconcealed before him; nor had he ever striven to veil it from the child whom he desired to sacrifice to his own personal views and ambition; and although, under such circumstances, policy induced him to affect towards the peer the respect and deference which appeared to be a legitimate homage yielded to his rank, the haughty merchant despised him in his secret heart, and looked upon him merely as a necessary tool to further his own views.

- Thus, each thoroughly understood the other; each had a point to carry, and each was equally resolved to carry that point, if success could be ensured by his own exertions.

As he had intimated to Lady Mary, Mr. Trevanion on the morrow had another interview with the earl, whom he encouraged to persevere, laughingly reminding him that no woman of spirit would willingly be won unsought; and dropping at the same time, as if accidentally, certain hints regarding the brilliant expectations of his daughter, which

wonderfully tended to increase the enthusiasm of the noble suitor.

This fact, however, Lord Downmere did not desire to render too apparent, and he consequently considered it expedient to evince something like sentiment, although an attempt to play the lover sat but loosely upon him.

"She is certainly a monstrous fine woman, my dear sir," he said, complacently; "a very fine woman indeed, and has no doubt every right to play the coquette a little before she yields—provided always that she yields at last; and as you assure me that she will do so——"

"Your lordship may rest assured of it."

"Well, then, I see no objection to the course which you propose, and I will afford her another opportunity of recanting her declared determination. I will call at your house again, but you must promise me the support of your influence and authority. I am so unaccustomed to this sort of thing, that I am quite unable to do justice to myself."

"Had not your lordship better see her alone?" asked the merchant.

"No, sir, no," was the eager rejoinder; "I consider your presence to be most desirable."

"As you will, my lord," said Mr. Trevanion, somewhat impatiently; "but, perhaps, after all, we had better be guided by circumstances. All that I will venture to urge, is that no time should be lost, as the present state of things must necessarily be unsatisfactory to all parties. My carriage is at the door; will your lordship accompany me at once to Richmond?"

"If you really consider it expedient for me to do so, certainly," was the reluctant reply; "although I have an important engagement at my club; but 'when a lady's in the case' you know, there is no alternative; and as you justly remark there will be many arrangements to make on both sides after the affair is decided, which will occupy a very considerable time; so let it be as you propose; in ten minutes I will be ready."

Lord Downmere was almost as good as his word, and in

less than half an hour the two gentlemen were on their way to the splendid villa of the merchant.

When their arrival was announced to Miss Trevanion, she excused herself on the plea of indisposition ; but a second and peremptory summons from her father compelled her appearance in the drawing-room, which she entered, to his intense mortification and displeasure, in a loose white muslin wrapper, with her fine hair hidden beneath a close and simple lace cap.

"Miss Trevanion!"—he exclaimed, angrily, "is that a fitting costume at such an hour, and for the reception of such a guest?"

"Not a word, my dear sir, not a word," said the earl, as, with a courteous inclination, he rose from his seat, and extended his hand to the pale and shrinking girl. "Have you yet to learn that ladies understand all these little matters to perfection ; and do you imagine that your fair daughter is not well aware that she is ten times as bewitching in her present costume as when avowedly adorned for conquest?"

"I trusted that my indisposition would have sufficed to excuse my non-appearance," said Ida, addressing her father, as, with a cold and haughty inclination of the head, she withdrew her hand from that of her unwelcome visitor.

"Well, well, since his lordship is kind enough to overlook so great a breach of decorum and good-breeding, we shall say no more upon the subject," said Mr. Trevanion, who could not conceal from himself, that had his daughter been influenced by the most refined coquetry, she could not have succeeded in appearing more lovely than in her present plain and simple attire ; "and we have, moreover, a more serious subject to discuss. Lord Downmere is here, Ida, to receive your final answer to the proposal with which he has honoured you.—Mark me, your *final* answer."

"I regret," was the firm rejoinder, "that his lordship should have considered such a visit necessary after our late interview. I had hoped——"

"Pshaw!" interposed the merchant, impetuously ; "all recurrence to the past is idle ; you know my determination, and you have now only to express your compliance with my will."

"And is it thus that the Earl of Downmere would woo his bride?" asked Ida, contemptuously.

"I am content to woo her after any fashion," said the peer, with a courteous bow; "so that I am happy enough to win her."

"Be generous, my lord," said Miss Trevanion, "and abandon a suit which can bring you neither honour nor happiness. I should be false, alike to you and myself, did I not at once avow that I have no longer a heart to bestow. I feel, as I have already declared, flattered by your preference, but I can never become your wife."

"So you assured me at our last interview, my dear young lady," replied the earl, perfectly unmoved; "but I am quite aware that it is one of the many privileges of your sex to torture the hearts of your admirers, and I accordingly trusted to time and reflection to operate a change in your decision."

"And your lordship did wisely," broke in the merchant, who with difficulty controlled his anger as he listened to the decided words of his daughter; "for women seldom know their own minds from one hour to another; and Miss Trevanion is at this moment an illustration of the fact. But we have already had somewhat too much of this folly; and she will do well to act more rationally, and to avow at once that she is both honoured and happy in the brilliant prospect which your flattering preference holds out to her."

"A devoted heart and a splendid position," said the peer, pompously; "what, my dear madam, can you require more than this?"

"Less, much less, would suffice to my ambition, my lord," replied Ida; "all I ask is the first, and you must pardon me if I frankly declare that it is a gift which you have not to bestow. Let us deal honestly with each other, Lord Downmere: I am not deceived as to my own position in life; and am quite aware that, despite all the indulgences which have been lavished upon me, I am still only the daughter of a merchant, who, however wealthy and however honoured he may be, is still merely a merchant; and that thus I am no fitting wife for the Earl of Downmere. Pardon me, father," she added, as she marked the displeasure

of Mr. Trevanion ; “ but this is no moment for idle pretence or frivolous vanity ; we must all look the truth steadily in the face, and not seek to deceive ourselves or each other by flimsy fallacies. I would not that Lord Downmere should suspect that the merchant, whose reputation is as untarnished, and whose blood is as ancient as his own, is now courting his alliance from any mean pandering to his rank and to the ennobling of his child, from a mere paltry love of title and aggrandisement, for I well know that it is not so—nor would I that my father, when urging me to plight my faith to a man whom I do not love, should so far delude himself as to imagine that the proud peer who condescends to sue for an affection which he can never gain, is influenced by any affection for myself. I see and bitterly feel the truth of my position. On one hand, I am to be made a medium of vengeance, and on the other——”

“ Enough, Miss Trevanion, enough !” exclaimed the merchant, vehemently, “ this insolence is intolerable and unprecedented. So far I have listened patiently, but my forbearance, great as it has been, has, nevertheless, a limit.”

“ I cannot, of course, presume to decide the motive which you were about to attribute to my addresses, my dear madam,” said the earl, waving his hand deprecatingly towards his excited host, “ but of this I can conscientiously assure you, that if you believe them to have been prompted by any other than my profound and ardent admiration of your many perfections, you not only do me a grievous wrong, but are unjust to yourself. As to the disparity of rank to which you have alluded, it is a mere chimera, when you do not require to be reminded that your grace and loveliness would do honour to a throne. And remember, madam, remember,” he pursued, emphatically, “ that as my bride—as my wife—as Countess of Downmere—you will stand near the steps of one, among the noblest and proudest of the realm. A rumour has reached me that I have a rival, younger, no doubt, and more likely to captivate the eye of one so lovely as yourself, than I can hope to be ; and although I had been assured the report was false, your own declaration that you have no longer a heart to bestow leads me to believe that such may nevertheless be the case ;

but let me entreat you to reflect, my dear young lady, before you consign attractions so brilliant as your own to comparative obscurity. You can be little aware of the extent of the sacrifice which you contemplate. You were made for the world, and you owe it to the world to fulfil your destiny. As my wife—as Countess of Downmere—it would be brilliant. For your own sake—for mine——”

“A thousand thanks, my good lord, a thousand thanks,” said the merchant, “for a condescension of which my wilful child is apparently so unworthy; but I entreat of you to urge her no further. She cannot be insensible to the generosity of your arguments, and *she will not*—to this I pledge myself. She has now exhausted her romance, and must be prepared to listen to reason. Once more I must request of you to leave the affair in my hands.”

“Another word and I have done,” said the earl, who gathered courage from the fear that the coveted wealth of the merchant might yet escape him, and who was anxious to compel the lady to something at least bordering upon concession. “I have endeavoured, my dear Miss Trevanion, to place before you the mere worldly advantages of an union which would make me supremely blessed; but I would also impress upon you the sincerity and ardour of my attachment, of which I am deeply grieved to be compelled to admit that you have expressed a doubt; do me more justice; and forgive me if I add that I was wholly unprepared for such mistrust and repugnance on your part after the encouragement which I received from your estimable father, upon whose good faith I placed the firmest and most complete reliance.”

“I know not, my lord,” said the wearied and persecuted girl, sadly, “what assurance my father may have given you—it is not for me to comment on his actions, or to criticise his motives. He has doubtlessly acted according to his own idea of propriety and right; but I at least am guiltless of having misled you for a moment; and harassing and painful as this subject cannot fail to have been to all parties, I trust that you will do me the justice to exonerate me from having wilfully prolonged it.”

“I can indeed most conscientiously acquit you of any

attempt to do so, Miss Trevanion," was the ironical rejoinder of the earl, "but I have nevertheless an undoubted right to complain of the careless and uncompromising manner in which you have rejected my addresses, conceiving, as I felt, that they might have met with more consideration."

"This persistence, my lord," said Ida, haughtily, "is rapidly degenerating into persecution; and is wholly deficient in both dignity and generosity. I cannot for a moment bring myself to believe that our very slight acquaintance can have inspired you with an attachment to myself personally which could alone afford an excuse for your extraordinary pertinacity; and I have consequently endeavoured to discover its true and adequate motive. On mature reflection I have only been enabled to imagine one, and that one so utterly incompatible with the exalted rank to which you evidently attach no mean value, that for the sake of your own dignity I can only trust that I do you an injustice. I have already so far overstepped the reserve of my sex as to admit to your lordship that my affections are bestowed elsewhere; and bestowed, I am proud to say, where my heart was the treasure sought, and not my wealth. What, then, my lord, do you seek in thus urging me to become your wife? I feel humbled by the reply forced upon me by my reason."

"Really, my dear madam, you are incomprehensible," said the peer, uneasily.

"Rather say, my lord, that she is unworthy of the honour which you propose to do her," exclaimed Mr. Trevanion, as he rose angrily from his seat; "but I am myself to blame for her wrong-headedness; she has been so long her own mistress that she appears to have forgotten her duty as a daughter and her courtesy as a woman. Trust me, this shall be remedied. And now, Miss Trevanion, hear me. You do not leave this room, or his lordship's presence, save as his affianced wife."

"Should Lord Downmere have no other engagement, sir," said Ida, firmly, as the deep blush of outraged pride spread over her cheek and brow, "my morning is also disengaged; and since such is your will, I can pass it here as

patiently, although perhaps not so pleasantly, as in my own apartment."

"My lord," said the merchant, struggling to subdue his irritation, "I am mortified beyond all expression that a child of mine should expose herself as Miss Trevanion has done; mortified and pained to find that my authority is thus set at nought; but I entreat you to believe that my plighted word *shall* not be forfeited. Prouder spirits than that of the young lady before you have been bent, and she shall learn ere long that a father's will is not to be braved with impunity. She may, as she insanely affects to believe, have given her heart to a beggar, but her hand must be my gift, and shall not follow it."

"Compose yourself, my good sir, compose yourself," said the peer, with an indulgent smile, "I am aware that young ladies are apt to be romantic, and to form magnificent ideas of 'love in a cottage;' but it is equally certain that on mature consideration they bring themselves to prefer a diamond tiara to a wreath of daisies; and to estimate the respectful attachment of a rational suitor beyond the wild and ephemeral passion of a mere boyish love."

Miss Trevanion started, and the blood burnt still more painfully upon her already crimsoned cheek.

"I cannot," pursued the earl; "I really have not moral courage enough, to say to your lovely and fascinating daughter, that I consent to resign her to a rival, for by so doing I should resign my own hopes of happiness; and the pertinacity of which she complains must sufficiently prove to her the value which I attach to her possession. You, at least, will not blame me for clinging to the last to the brightest dream of happiness in which I have ever indulged. The 'slight acquaintance' upon which Miss Trevanion lays such stress as regards her own feelings, has been a period so full of hope and anxiety to myself that it appears to have absorbed the best portion of my existence; and rather than forego an anticipation which has made that existence doubly dear to me, I am content still to wait, if such should be her pleasure, until she does me more justice."

"I thank you, my lord, deeply and earnestly thank you,

for your forbearance," said Mr. Trevanion, "and in reply to so much generosity, can only assure you that your patience shall not be too severely taxed."

"I rely upon your promise," said the earl, as he rose from the sofa upon which he had been seated, and bowed low to the lady, who acknowledged his parting courtesy in silence, "and the devotion of a life shall prove to your charming daughter that I am worthy of the prize for which I have so resolutely striven."

In another moment Ida was alone.

CHAPTER XV

A DINNER PARTY.

IDA was alone with her own thoughts, and for awhile they were full of angry bitterness. Towards the earl they were compounded of contempt and disgust. "No, no, it is not to me that he has bowed his paltry pride," she murmured to herself; "it is not for me that he has condescended to submit to insult, and to smile upon inferences which he could not have mistaken. He seeks me for my wealth; he would enrich himself, and make me the victim of his selfish cupidity. And I am without a friend—flattered and fooled by the world, there does not beat one heart upon which I can lay down my weary head, and ask for rest.

"And yet I have dreamt such dreams of happiness—indulged such hopes of peace and of affection—peace!—affection!—what has a persecuted woman to do with blessings such as those. My estimate of life has been a false one, and now I begin to appreciate the frightful truth; perhaps I am wrong to struggle against my destiny—perhaps I should do well to give myself to this titled coward, who is just brave enough to make war upon the sacred feelings of a woman's heart—I should find my reward in the world, my recompense in its smooth wisdom. I should make a brilliant marriage, be fooled and flattered still, wear the shame

of a perjured spirit proudly, and find in the crowded saloons of fashion the home which I should have forfeited for ever elsewhere. It may be that such a fate might preserve me from deeper and more fatal suffering—it may be; for, in this case, I could live on without a fear or a hope; the one would be annihilated by the other; giving no love, I could never be subject to the pang of feeling it thrown back upon me, and the fire-flood of my passion indurated into lava, and crushing out my existence. And what if I become the wife of Sydney! Who shall tell me what may be my fate! What may be his! Poverty and Time—those are the gaunt and fearful adversaries with which I shall have to contend; and what will be their effect on him? It is easy to talk of tempests under a summer sky, and of wrecks beside a summer sea, but beneath the lightning flash, and on the roaring billows, we can alone estimate the extent of the evil. Should I marry Sydney, and become the bane of his existence, where then could I turn for help or comfort? and that I should do this were he to arouse the slumbering demon within me, I have a firm and fatal conviction. I cannot deceive myself; to him in whom I trust, to whom I give myself, I must either be a blessing or a curse—everything, or worse, far worse than nothing. A firm and faithful friend, or a bitter and unrelenting enemy. And knowing this, should I not do well and bravely to sacrifice my own happiness at once—to resist the pleadings of my own heart—and to refuse to become his wife? Could I not drown my own wretchedness and isolation in what the world calls pleasure—silence the importunities of my own rebellious spirit in the turmoil of dissipation, and console myself with the reflection that I was the only sufferer? Surely there would be heroism in this! But have I strength for such a sacrifice? Can I consent to make it while one hope is left that Sydney's love might prove as lasting as my own? No; it is vain to strive against myself: and if I cannot read the future I must be content to risk its fruits. This womanish weakness is unworthy of me; I must trust, and abide by the issue of my faith. I cannot live loveless and alone, devouring my own heart, and feeling that I have been the passive tool of avarice and ambition. My path is plain

before me; and, rugged as it now is, it may lead to happiness at last."

It is a trite, but true remark that when sorrow or even death is in a house, still the routine of domestic duties must be pursued, and, in the former case, society still maintains its claim. Thus it was on the present occasion; with one absorbing subject of interest pressing heavily upon her heart and mind, Miss Trevanion found herself compelled to obey the suggestion of her maid, by whom she was reminded that it was time to prepare herself to receive the guests who were, as she had in her excitement totally forgotten, expected that day at dinner. Every one has experienced at some moment of his or her life the weariness of such an appeal to the patience; and this simple circumstance tended still further to reconcile our heroine to the prospect of the "mere competence" which must, at least, have a tendency to relieve her from sacrifices so irksome during her married life.

"Now," she mused, "I do not even belong to myself, the chains of the world are round me; and though they may have hitherto appeared to be wreathed with flowers, the illusion is past, and I feel the galling of their iron links."

Alas! wreath them as we may, none of us escape the pressure to our dying hour; the careless may wear them loosely, but even they can never throw them off. We have visions of moral freedom in the future—we delude ourselves day by day with the hope that some change of scene or circumstance may emancipate us—but is it ever realised?

Several of the guests had already arrived when Miss Trevanion descended to the drawing-room. There were three or four steady men of demure age—the personal friends, or rather associates, of her father, for the self-sufficing merchant made no friends in the strict acceptance of the term; a titled dowager or two belonging to the clique of Lady Mary Brookland; middle-aged women, who fully appreciated the merits of whist and East India Madeira, and who were not yet totally insensible to the hope of repairing their widowhood by a second marriage, where their rank

might prove an equivalent to the wealth of some ambitious commoner.

And perhaps it was a relief to Ida that the party was thus constituted—although in the lightness of her heart she had been accustomed to regard such assemblages as a wearisome infliction—for thus there was little demand upon her own exertions; she had but to listen and to endure; and as she looked very lovely while doing so, her silence was unnoticed amid the animated chatter of the dowagers, the sententious declamation of the politicians, and the languid ejaculations of her mother.

One circumstance only tended to annoy and discompose her, and that one was the extraordinarily-significant glances which were turned on her from time to time, the little smiling nods, and patronising smiles of the ladies, and the less demonstrative but equally peculiar looks of the gentlemen. She appeared to herself to have suddenly become the object of some occult interest to every one about her; nor did she fail to remark that the usually expressionless face of her mother exhibited a self-congratulatory complacency which it had never before worn. Lady Mary alone was calm and stately as usual, and appeared totally unconscious of any extraneous cause of excitement.

Suddenly, however, the thoughts of Ida were diverted into a fresh channel by the mention of a name which she was aware could never be uttered in the presence of her father without exciting an unpleasant emotion.

“By-the-bye, Trevanion,” said Mr. Plumbtree, a county member who was engaged with his host in some important commercial speculations, “are you aware that your uncle is in town? I met him yesterday, and I need scarcely tell you that his first subject was that unlucky farm that forms so ugly an angle into his estate, and which he is so constantly urging me to sell, although I have decidedly refused to part with it for the last ten years. It seems that Lady Trevanion has set her heart upon converting it into a dress-dairy, where she may skim her cream out of glass and porcelain, and play Marie Antoinette at Trianon on a small scale.”

"I was *not* aware that Sir Jasper Trevanion was in town," was the cold reply, "for, as we hold no communication whatever, I am necessarily ignorant of his movements."

"I wish that your difference, be it what it may, could be adjusted," said the guest, "and I have reason to suspect that the baronet would gladly meet you half-way. What say you? Will you allow me to negotiate between you?"

"I believe that both parties are well satisfied with things as they are," was the discouraging rejoinder.

"I must be allowed to differ from you," persisted Mr. Plumbtree, "for, to my surprise, your stately kinsman made many inquiries concerning yourself and your family, which convinced me that he considered the feuds to have endured long enough; while, to be candid with you, the present moment seems a very propitious one for you to tender or receive the olive branch, the 'coming event' being calculated to ensure you high ground."

As Miss Trevanion raised her eyes to her father in some anxiety to learn the spirit in which he would receive the suggestion, she saw his own fixed upon herself with an uneasy expression which startled her; nor were his next words more intelligible than his look.

"It is extremely probable," he said, drily, "that the baronet and his son may be more deeply interested in the event to which you allude than they anticipate. I must decline, however, until it has actually taken place, all overtures to a reconciliation, which, had Sir Jasper been enabled years ago to foresee the future, would never have been necessary. I fully appreciate the kindness of your motive, my dear sir, but we will, if you please, dismiss a subject which cannot prove otherwise than uninteresting to the friends by whom we are surrounded."

"Is Lady Trevanion also in town?" eagerly inquired his wife, heedless of the desire which he had expressed that so ungracious a theme should not be thus publicly pursued.

"Yes, madam, both Lady Trevanion and her son; and a very fine and promising young man he is. We are quite proud of him in the county, I assure you, where he is, as

you may believe, the object of more than one long-sighted speculation."

"How delightful for his mother," whined out the weak hostess, with a very audible sigh; "I have often regretted that I never had a son."

"Your regrets are uncalled for, my dear madam," said Sir Giles Euston, who sat near her; "when we look across the table—you could not have anticipated perfection in both instances."

"Besides which," followed up a jewelled matron, with an encouraging smile to Ida, who became more and more perplexed as the conversation proceeded, "even Mrs. Trevanion, with her usual good sense and judgment, must perceive at once that this is no moment to encourage such a feeling. Few mothers, I should imagine, have greater reason to be both proud and gratified than herself."

"A fact of which my friend Mrs. Trevanion is fully aware, I can assure you, my dear Lady Somers," said the stately Lady Mary, with a deprecatory smile; "but I must really entreat your forbearance for Ida, who is, I can see, uneasy under this avalanche of flattery."

"It is its tone rather than its tenor, by which I am discomposed," said the young lady, smiling in her turn, but with a very different expression; "I am at a loss to understand the mysterious import of the covert congratulations of which I am evidently the object to-day; although I cannot but feel deeply touched that such should be lavished on me at the very moment when they were the least anticipated."

"How prettily she keeps her secret," whispered Sir Giles to his supine neighbour, who was about to utter one of her inane and inopportune replies, when her voice was drowned beneath that of Lady Mary, who hastened to inquire, with well-simulated curiosity, of Mr. Plumbtree, "if Lady Trevanion had come to town for the birthday."

"I do not pretend to say that such was the precise errand," was his reply, "but I understand that it is at all events her intention. Ladies, as you must be aware, madam, who possess a Golconda in their jewel-cases are not sorry to have so brilliant an opportunity of displaying their trea-

tures ; and Sir Jasper certainly mentioned that both he and his wife had determined to attend the drawing-room."

"That will be charming!" exclaimed the hostess, thoroughly roused out of her apathy. "Do you hear, Ida? You will at last see your grand-aunt—for Ida is also to be at the drawing-room, Sir Giles; and——"

"Mrs. Trevanion, will you be good enough to send Lady Somers some pine?" broke in the merchant, in a tone by which she was at once silenced, and which rendered her hand so unsteady that she gratefully accepted the proffered aid of the officious Sir Giles, who hastened to relieve her from the duty which thus suddenly devolved upon her; while, as if warned that she had, in some way or other, for which she could not account, excited the displeasure of her husband, the cowed and cowering woman, after casting one timid glance of inquiry towards the family friend, who replied by a gracious gesture of assent, bowed silently to Lady Somers, and rose to leave the table.

Her example was immediately followed; and in a few moments the ladies of the party were assembled in the drawing-room, cosily established upon sofas and lounges, to spend over coffee and gossip the hour which must intervene before the reappearance of their lords. This was an interval which Mrs. Trevanion habitually passed, if not quite in sleep, at least in silence; so little was expected from her, that she had no motive for exertion; and accordingly, she had no sooner plunged into the depths of her cushions, leaving her daughter and Lady Mary to do the honours of the house, than she sank into total eclipse, to the great relief of the latter, who tolerated with difficulty the harmless but wearisome vanities of the woman whom she had supplanted in all her privileges alike of hostess, wife, and mother.

"You will, no doubt, chaperon Miss Trevanion to court as usual, Lady Mary," observed Mrs. Darlington, with a sarcastic smile, as she poised the gold spoon upon the surface of her coffee-cup; "it must really be a great fatigue to you to be so persevering in your attendance! Once a year the thing is bearable enough at our age; essential, in fact, to our position in society; but, like all other duties, it

degenerates into a bore from frequent recurrence; and, *entre nous*, unless one has a place in the household, I am inclined to think that——”

“It is a heavy expense; and so it is, no doubt,” interposed Lady Somers, as she scattered the chips of a wafer which she had been steeping in her Mocha over the rich carpet; “but, fortunately for Miss Trevanion, expense is no consideration with her; and it is only women situated as I was, and as you are, the wives of younger sons, whose bills are inconveniently increased by these court ceremonies; but even were it otherwise, our fair friend could scarcely remain absent from the birthday, situated as she is at this moment.”

“May I venture to inquire why my attendance is so essential on this particular occasion, Lady Somers?” inquired the young lady; “and what peculiarity there is in my present position which appears to enforce it?”

“Upon my honour, my dear Miss Trevanion, you do indeed bear your faculties meekly,” said her interlocutor, gaily; “it is not every young lady on the eve of marriage with a peer of the realm who would ask such a question.”

“I do not understand you, madam,” was the cold rejoinder.

“Come, come, you may trust us, my dear,” persisted the lady, significantly; “we are in the secret; and I can assure you that both Mrs Darlington and myself sincerely rejoice in your good fortune, and congratulate both Lady Mary and your father upon the successful issue of all their care; you will do them honour, my dear Miss Trevanion, and make a charming addition to the peerage. It is, indeed, quite a triumph, both for yourself and your family, and will be a sad blow to poor dear Lady Wallscourt, who, after all her scheming, has just been compelled, to her extreme mortification, to marry her three daughters to commoners, and yet they were really nice girls, very nice girls, and even tolerably good-looking; but then they had no money; and really society is now in such a factitious state that men of all stations look for fortunes with their wives, especially men of rank, who are quite aware of the value of what they have to bestow.”

"You labour under some strange mistake as regards myself, madam," said Ida, quietly, "as I do not anticipate becoming the recipient of the honour to which you allude."

"Now don't be obstinate, Ida," drawled her mother, suddenly leaning forward in her chair; "Lady Somers knows that you are to marry Lord Downmere. Your father mentioned that it was all settled, before you came into the drawing-room, to-night."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion, indignantly.

"Quite the contrary, my love," laughed Mrs. Darlington; "we have been assured that it is an *affaire finie*, and very well finished too, take my word for it. You see papas *will* betray secrets; it is their privilege; so do not look so terribly aggrieved, but receive our congratulations with a good grace."

"Did my father—did Mr. Trevanion, really state this to be the case?" asked the agitated girl, as her proud eye flashed, and her cheek crimsoned.

"Yes, yes; you are fairly committed," said Lady Somers, "and will make your curtsy to her majesty as a bride-elect."

"I think that she ought to wear white and pearls; that is my opinion," droned Mrs. Trevanion, "if they wish to know it."

No answer was vouchsafed by any of the party, but every eye was riveted upon Ida, who stood with parted lips and heaving bosom, alternately looking from one to the other. She was stung to the very heart, smitten to the depths of her spirit; she could not misunderstand the ungenerous advantage which had been taken of her; she felt that she was in the toils; but her whole nature rose in rebellion against the moral wrong of which her father had been guilty; the sacredness of her affections had been violated, and a feeling of resentment arose within her which at once restored her to composure.

From that moment she listened like one who had no interest in the subject under discussion. She scorned to utter a disclaimer—what to her, with her bruised and wounded pride, was the trifling gossipry of a couple of idle women—straws floating upon the current; while the wound

inflicted by her father sank down into the deep waters of her soul, and rested there.

"The last tie is dissolved which bound us," she murmured to herself as she retired for the night; "every human being, breathing the air of heaven, is gifted with the privilege of free will where the happiness of a whole existence is at stake. Mine has been denied to me; I have been degraded into a subject of idle twaddle and sarcastic gossip. Be it so. Henceforward it must be *ruse* for *ruse*."

CHAPTER XVI.

"AN EVENT IN HIGH LIFE," &c.

WHEN the father and daughter met on the morrow, their meeting was cold and constrained, and neither alluded to the subject by which they were severally engrossed; Mrs. Trevanion, as was her habit after receiving company, breakfasted in her dressing-room, considering it incumbent upon her to be overcome by fatigue; the merchant buried himself in the columns of the *Times*, and Lady Mary skimmed the pages of the *Morning Post*. The meal was a dreary one; and at its close Mr. Trevanion ceremoniously presented to his daughter a folded paper which was lying beside him, with the intimation that he desired to give a ball on the evening of the birthday, and that she would find in that list the names of the guests whom he personally desired to invite, leaving the necessary additions to the discretion of Lady Mary Brookland and herself.

"You will see, Miss Trevanion," he said, coldly, "that the one which heads the list is that of the Earl of Downmere; you will know who should, and who should not, be invited to meet his lordship; and I need scarcely tell you for your guidance that you are *committed*."

"To what, sir?" inquired Ida, with a kindling cheek.

"To the world, and to your own dignity and propriety of feeling. By sunset this evening, thanks to a knot of marvel-

loving and marvel-disseminating women, all London will be aware that you are pledged to the earl, and that this ball is given in honour of your betrothal. You will therefore act accordingly. Not a word, if you please; the subject has been already sufficiently discussed between us, and I beg to be spared all further verbiage upon a topic which has become distasteful to me. Will you do me the favour to send out the cards by to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," was the calm reply.

"Do not, Lady Mary, if you please, exceed three hundred," pursued the merchant; "I need not say that, with one solitary exception, all your friends will be, as ever, both welcome and acceptable. I will make the necessary arrangements with Gunter; and perhaps you will oblige me by issuing your own orders to Taplow. I am sorry to tax your kindness so heavily, but I am selfish enough to be unwilling to forego the advantage of your taste and experience."

"I should like, at least, to understand the extent of your intentions, my dear sir," said the lady.

"Your judgment will be their best limit, madam," was the courteous reply; "I would request of you to bear in mind the *intention* of the festival, and to render it worthy of its motive."

"I will endeavour to fulfil your wishes to the letter," smiled the family friend, careless that her nearest relative was officially excluded from the contemplated fête, as, with a stately bow, Mr. Trevanion bade her "good morning," and stepped into his carriage.

"Surely, my dear Ida, you are not about to abandon me with this herculean task upon my hands," exclaimed Lady Mary, as her young companion was about to leave the room.

"I must beg to be excused all participation in your labour," said Miss Trevanion, with a bitter smile; "Simmonds shall furnish you with the visiting-book, from which I will direct him to erase the name of Mr. Sydney Elphinstone, and you will then have no difficulty save that of selection."

"Do you wish to visit upon me the annoyance caused by your father?" asked the lady, deprecatingly.

"By no means; but I disclaim all further right of interference under this roof."

"Nay, nay; is not such a disclaimer either premature or childish?"

"I think not."

"Upon what then do you base it?"

"Upon the very simple fact that the exclusion of the individual who would have been the most welcome to myself, renders the whole affair indifferent to me."

"Remember, Ida, that I might equally have declined the task on the pretext that my own nephew was put *hors de combat*."

"You might, madam; but you did not."

"As a matter of course! I can have no right to dictate to Mr. Trevanion what guests he shall receive under his own roof?"

"Certainly not; nor have I on my part attempted to do so; but I may at least exert my undoubted privilege of resenting the insult offered to one who is excluded."

"I do really wish, my dear girl, that I could induce you to listen to reason. Much as you resent your father's opposition to your wishes," said Lady Mary, "I can assure you that he is actuated only by a desire to ensure your happiness."

"Did you always think so, madam?" asked her companion, coldly.

"Yes, certainly—that is, after I found——"

"That your nephew, in becoming the husband of Ida Trevanion, would not secure the hand of Mr. Trevanion's heiress. Oh, trust me, madam, we do not deceive each other. But we need not waste words upon this subject—my father is right; it has indeed been sufficiently discussed; let us dismiss it, and each perform our promise. Invite your own guests—I will take care that the cards shall be duly delivered; and, if it should chance by accident that my poor mother should possess some unsuspected friend whom it might pleasure her to see at her side among the crowd by which she will be overlooked, perhaps you

will do me the favour to insert that name where, in my selfishness, I might have sought to inscribe another."

Before Lady Mary could reply, Miss Trevanion had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER.

IDA did not, as on former occasions, retreat to her room to give way to feelings of doubt and wretchedness. The first, after the declaration made by her father, was at an end; and from the last she steadily resolved to escape through her own agency. An emotion of indignant resentment swelled at her heart; she saw her affections and free-will set at naught, and her name compromised without hesitation or apology; and a proud consciousness of her power over her future destiny invested her with a strength to which, despite her bold seeming, she had not previously attained. She walked composedly to the hall-table, effaced the name of Mr. Elphinstone from the visiting-book, and desired a servant to carry it without delay to the breakfast-room, after which she proceeded to her own apartment to meditate upon her future line of conduct. Convinced as she was of the sincerity of Elphinstone's affection, it irked her proud nature to condescend, after her resolute refusal to quit her father's roof with him as a fugitive, to volunteer even under the present circumstances a retractation of her denial. She painfully felt that so extreme a step could be rendered endurable to her own sense of delicacy and self-respect only by the earnest pleadings of the man for whom she was about to sacrifice all her long-cherished dreams of prosperity and filial duty; and although, while smarting under the first sting of wounded pride, she had resolved to emancipate herself at once by uniting her fate with that of Mr. Elphinstone, she had no sooner seated herself at her desk than the difficulty of declaring her determination rushed upon her in

its full force, and dyed her cheek and brow with crimson. A thousand possibilities swept across her imagination, and almost maddened her. What if his prudence, and the representations of his calculating relatives, should have produced a change in his sentiments—what would then be her position? Would she not be an object of scorn to the world, and degraded for ever in her own eyes? The thought was a bitter one; she flung down her pen: she felt as though she had not courage to brave such a contingency; and she was still wavering between love and pride, when Mademoiselle Seraphine entered the room, and with a significant smile laid down a note beside her, saying as she did so,—

“I trust that madame will not be displeased, but I have promised to convey an answer to monsieur.”

“From whom did you receive this?” inquired Miss Trevanion, who had instantly recognised the handwriting of her lover.

“From a gentleman who is now waiting in his boat upon the river,” was the reply of the soubrette; “I had gone down to the hermitage for some clematis for the *jardinière* of madame; of course I asked no questions—*je suis trop discrète*, although I comprehended at once that he was a messenger from milord.”

“I will return an answer an hour hence, mademoiselle,” said her mistress; “I presume that the gentleman, be he who he may, is not in haste.”

“He said that he would wait madame’s pleasure.”

“Such being the case, you had better complete the task upon which you were engaged; I will summon you when my letter is written, should it be necessary to send a reply,” said Ida, controlling her agitation, “although it appears to me a very extraordinary method of communication, for which I can only account by supposing, that the circumstance of seeing you upon the spot must have induced the bearer of the note before me to spare himself the trouble of landing, and coming up to the house.”

“*Peut-être*,” said the soubrette, with a peculiar accent.

“What can you possibly mean by that very significant ‘perhaps,’ mademoiselle?” demanded Miss Trevanion

haughtily; "do you mean to infer that you suspect me of being engaged in a clandestine correspondence?"

"I am sorry to have displeased madame," replied the wily French woman, with well-acted humility; "but as I learnt from the *maitre-d'hôtel* that monsieur had desired that all letters addressed to madame should be delivered only to himself, and that two had already been received which had not been given to me to carry to madame, I thought that perhaps milord——"

"Enough, enough, mademoiselle," said her mistress, with difficulty repressing her indignation at this new outrage, "be good enough to form no conjectures which may, and in all probability must, turn out to be erroneous. Do as I have directed, and when I again require your presence I will summon you."

As the soubrette disappeared, Ida tore open the letter.

"What am I to understand?" wrote Mr. Elphinstone, "why have you so suddenly and so cruelly discarded me? Oh, Ida, beloved of my soul, you little know the heart which you are torturing. Not one word in reply to my letters—no token of your continued affection to sustain me during the bitter interval of suspense and trial to which you have yourself condemned me. How have I deserved this? Is not your love the very principle of my existence? and will you not, by assuring me of its continuance, enable me to bear our painful separation? Oh, did you only know—could you only suspect—all that I endure, surely you would not sacrifice me to the vain prejudices of the world which you have been taught to worship, but which can never render even to you the homage of a true and loyal heart like that which you are so coldly casting from you. Once more I ask—can you, and will you, resign it for my sake? Have you sufficient faith in my honour and in my affection to trust your destiny in my hands? Forgive me for thus urging you, but I am maddened by doubts and fears, which not even the consciousness of your pure and truthful nature suffices to dispel. Banished from your presence, deprived of the solace of feasting my eyes upon the characters traced by your hand, life itself has become odious to me. It will cost me a severe effort to approach your father's house like a

criminal dreading detection ; to skulk about his premises, and to bribe one of his menials—but I have resolved to do even this, much as it revolts my sense of right, in order to assure myself that this appeal at least will reach you. Do not refuse me a reply—let me know my fate, whatever you have decreed. It is for you to decide whether we are to be separated for ever, with that bitter gulf, the world, between us ; or if, despising the vain gauds of that same hollow world, you will make a home of peace and love in my affection.

“ SYDNEY.”

There was no hesitation now in the demeanour of Miss Trevanion ; with a firm and rapid hand she traced line after line, until she had revealed to her expectant lover every circumstance which had occurred since their last meeting, and assured him of the full and perfect confidence with which she should unite her destiny to his. She told him, too, her projects for the future, and bade him trust to her firmness for their accomplishment. “ Fear not that I shall hesitate or quail before the difficulties which may present themselves,” she said, in conclusion : “ the bad faith and treachery of those by whom I am surrounded exonerate me in my own eyes. I shall go to you poor alike in wealth and friends, but the riches of your love will more than compensate for all other privations. But remember, Sydney, how solemnly you have sworn that the love, which, when once I shall have become your wife, will absorb my whole being, shall never fail me ;—remember how solemnly I have on my part assured *you* that misery and ruin beyond your wildest fears, would and must be the result of your falsehood ; and if you feel the faith in the stability of your affection which I am willing to place in it, wait undoubtingly until the moment I shall have appointed for our final meeting, and I will become yours for ever.”

“ Deliver this letter to the person who awaits it, *mademoiselle*,” she said, as the French woman appeared in obedience to her summons ; “ I have taken care that you shall not be subjected to the same trouble for the future ; and am sorry to have detained the messenger so long on this occasion.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE JEWEL CASKET.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Trevanion had, as we have shown, coldly discouraged all allusion to his estranged relatives when the subject of a reconciliation was mooted by the warm-hearted Mr. Plumbtree, yet the knowledge that his uncle was not only in town, but that he had acknowledged himself interested in the welfare of those of whom he had during so many years affected to have forgotten the existence, flattered his self-love, and occupied his thoughts. He was well aware that had he been worsted in his struggle with the world, neither Sir Jasper, nor his haughty wife, would have deigned to have made a single inquiry into his fate; and it was consequently with a feeling of natural and pardonable exultation that he dwelt upon the social advantages by which he was surrounded, and remembered that he owed them all to his own indomitable energy and perseverance.

"Aye," he murmured to himself, with a proud smile; "he has learnt, at last, that the boy whom he thrust forth, and to whom he would fain have denied even the name which was his birthright, no longer needs the support that he so ruthlessly withheld: he has heard too, as it would seem, that I have a daughter, whose hand is sought by some of the proudest of the land; and, who knows? he may perhaps covet it for his son—for the boy who stands between me and the fond hopes which I once indulged; but he has still to learn that I have a new triumph in store, and it is now his turn to feel the pang of disappointment; or it may be that long ere this, the gossip of the town has taught him that the child of the neglected Hubert Trevanion is about to become a peeress! Well may he seek for his *parvenue* wife the honour of such an alliance; but let him not imagine that I have either forgotten or forgiven the wrong

which I experienced at her hands. It rankles yet, and it shall be avenged. It is well that they are here; just so would I that it should be. As the betrothed bride of an earl, Ida will excite even more than her usual meed of admiration at court, and it is there that they will meet for the first time. Accident has favoured me in this, at least; and the obscure country dame will be taught to feel her insignificance beside the fashion and favour of my high-bred daughter."

Carried away by his soaring fancies, Mr. Trevanion lost sight for a time of the difficulties which yet presented themselves to his darling project in the resolute attitude assumed by the young lady herself; satisfied that by giving a premature publicity to Lord Downmere's addresses, he should compel his daughter to obedience, and cause her to sacrifice her affections to her regard for the opinion of the world, he almost succeeded in divesting himself of all anxiety upon the subject. He had carefully intercepted the letters of Elphinstone, and he trusted that the mere suspicion of his neglect would excite her indignation, and mould her to his own will. Of any further interference on the part of Lady Mary Brookland he had no fear, as he had not been for so many years domesticated with that very self-seeking individual without appreciating at their just value the qualities of her heart and mind. That she would have encouraged by every means in her power a marriage between her needy nephew and his heiress, he well knew; but he was also quite aware that the threat which he had held out of discarding Ida for ever in the event of disobedience, had worked a decided change in her ladyship's sentiments and views. Thus, then, he believed himself secure; and disregarding the undisguised repugnance of Ida, he insisted that her preparations for the birthday presentation should be of the most costly and expensive kind.

Hitherto, guided by her own judicious and unerring taste, Miss Trevanion had on such occasions studiously avoided all affectation of display; nor had her father sought to change her resolution, although his pride would not permit him to acquiesce in her reasons for a simplicity of attire,

which he considered misplaced ; on this occasion, however, he forbade all opposition ; and, heedless of her entreaties, he sternly commanded that his will should be obeyed.

Sick at heart, and burthened by a painful consciousness of the bitter disappointment which she was about to inflict upon his pride, Ida was dragged by her officious chaperone from one emporium of vanity to another, and daily compelled to listen for hours to discussions in which, although she was herself their object, she could not even affect an interest ; and thus the time wore wearily on until the day drew near which was to be the turning-point of her whole after-existence.

The house was full of upholsterers and florists preparing for the fête, and scarcely an apartment remained uninvaded ; even in her own room the wretched girl could with difficulty succeed in securing herself from intrusion ; and yet what fearful need she had of solitude ! As she gazed wildly about her, her breath came quick and short, and the hot blood throbbed like a lava-tide in her aching temples. Scattered over the chairs and sofas lay the rich satins and tissues which seemed to mock at her misery, and to deepen the sinfulness of the act to which she had pledged herself. At times she clenched her hands fiercely together, as though she would have clutched and rent them ; and at others the large tears coursed slow and cold down her pallid cheeks, and a faintness as of death appeared to paralyse her spirit, as she sat with her gaze riveted upon the ground, buried in her own miserable thoughts. Yet still she did not waver ; her heart was firm even while she acknowledged to herself that the pang was a more bitter one than she had feared : “ My mother—my poor mother ! ” was the voiceless cry of that smitten heart ; “ who will she have to love her when I am gone ? ” Could she have detected one look of affection, one symptom of sympathy on the stern countenance of her father, as pale and sad she met him day by day when the family assembled at their hurried meals, she felt that she could have flung herself on her knees before him, and once more urged him not to drive her to an act of desperation unworthy of herself ; but Mr. Trevanion continued calm

and cold, and vouchsafed no comment on her altered appearance.

The conversation at table turned wholly on the arrangements for the ball, and was interspersed with the querulous complaints of her mother, whose comfort had been invaded, and whose suggestions had been treated with disregard. Like all weak people, Mrs. Trevanion visited her annoyance upon those whom she could blame without fear of reprisal; and thus, not daring to reproach either her husband or Lady Mary, she poured forth the diluted vials of her wrath upon her daughter, to whom she found it expedient to attribute her privations and mortification.

Those only who have been subjected to such an ordeal as this, when their hearts were bursting with a hidden grief, can appreciate the feeling with which her victim listened to her senseless upbraidings, and sought to appease her anger; how truly could she have assured her that her petty sorrows, irksome as they might be to bear, were but as atoms beside the one great misery by which she was herself borne down; but her lips were sealed; and when she could have cried aloud for mercy even from the very depths of her spirit, she bowed her head, and suffered in silence.

At length the eventful day arrived; and great was the exultation of Mademoiselle Seraphine when, on presenting herself to dress her young lady for court, she placed upon the toilette a casket which had just arrived as an offering from the Earl of Downmere, and which contained a magnificent *parure* of opals and pearls.

“*Mais c'est vraiment superbe!*” she exclaimed, holding the costly gems against the light. “*Madame sera ravissante! En voilà pour au moins mille livres—et d'un goût!—d'un goût!*”

Ida shuddered, and turned away. “Arrange my hair as simply as circumstances will permit,” she said, languidly; “I shall be weighed down by finery, which your good taste must subdue as far as may be possible. That tinsel trumpery upon my dress annoys me; remove it, mademoiselle, and replace it by something less obtrusive.”

“*Mais, Madame——*”

"You will oblige me by obeying my directions," interposed Miss Trevanion, in a tone of decision, which her attendant well knew that it was vain to dispute.

"Madame must then choose between white roses and pomegranate blossoms," was the sullen reply; "it will be impossible to loop this silver blonde with any other colour."

"You are right," said Ida, with a faint smile, "the white roses are precisely suited to the occasion."

"But madame will of course permit me to arrange this *guirlande* in her hair," persisted the *femme-de-chambre*, as she pointed to a diadem contained in the jewel-case of the earl, "to match the ornaments upon her robe?"

"I shall not wear them," was the indifferent reply, as Miss Trevanion closed the casket and thrust it from her; "my mother has been kind enough to offer me the loan of her diamonds, and I could not pay her so poor a compliment as to appear in any others."

"*A la bonne heure!*" ejaculated the French woman, whose personal vanity was involved in the appearance of her mistress; and without further opposition the toilette of the young lady was completed.

And very lovely were the face and figure reflected in the cheval glass, when the task of the accomplished Mademoiselle Seraphine was brought to a close. It is true that the cheek of Ida was very pale, and her whole appearance languid and subdued, but this circumstance rather tended to enhance than to diminish the peculiar style of her beauty. With her dark hair parted smoothly across her brow, cinctured by a bandeau of brilliants, from which the white plumes fell back like a shower of mist; the girdle of her costly robe fastened by a single diamond of great size and price, and her snowy train looped by hedge-roses, she was indeed the very perfection of queen-like loveliness; and for a moment even her voluble attendant gazed upon her in silent admiration.

"*Sont-elles belles, ces Anglaises?*" was her mental ejaculation, as she handed to her mistress her gloves and bouquet on the announcement of the carriage; when Miss Trevanion proceeded to the apartment of her mother, as was her usual custom, to give and receive a parting kiss.

"Well, Ida," exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion, with unusual

animation, as she saw her approach, "you are come at last to show me Lord Downmere's present. How do the opals suit your dress? But, bless me, child, you have not put them on! And you have ruined both your skirt and train by removing the silver ribbons. What can you mean by wasting so much money? And why did you not wear your opals?"

"Because, mother," replied the young lady, with a sad smile, "I felt happier in these jewels which belong to you."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Trevanion, querulously, "I wanted to see what his lordship had sent to you, and you seem to take a pleasure in disappointing me."

"So far from it," was the rejoinder of Ida, as she pressed her lips upon the brow of her mother, "that you have only to desire Seraphine to bring them to you, when you can inspect them at your leisure. Indeed, you will do me a favour if you will allow me to leave them in your custody."

"Well, then, ring the bell, and give your orders, only let me see them at once," was the impatient reply; "and now go, for you must be keeping Lady Mary waiting."

With a weary sigh Miss Trevanion obeyed. No kind wish, no exulting assurance from a mother's lips went with her; no comment had been elicited by her heavy eye and pallid cheek, no return of her endearment had been offered; and as she descended the staircase which was already garlanded with flowers, and starred with minute lampions in preparation for the festival of the night, her heart swelled almost to bursting, and it was only by a violent effort that she drove back the tears which fain would have forced a passage.

"Not one memory of affection to bear away with me," she murmured to herself, "not one! But perhaps it is better so; I shall not break one loving heart; I shall not betray one trusting spirit. A few glittering baubles will suffice to supply my place—I shall be soon discarded and forgotten!"

And the radiant being who felt and reflected thus, was decked in diamonds and wreathed with roses!

In the hall, Miss Trevanion encountered her chaperone, stately in purple velvet and antique point. As her beautiful

charge approached her, Lady Mary gave one rapid glance over her person, by which she instantly detected the failure of all her laborious arrangements, but she vouchsafed no remark upon the subject; and ere long the well-appointed equipage with its occupants whirled through the gates upon its courtly errand.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BIRTHDAY.

MR. TREVANION had calculated correctly. The intelligence of his daughter's betrothal to Lord Downmere had circulated throughout all the circles likely to take an interest in the event; and great, consequently, was the curiosity excited by her appearance. As is usual in cases of the kind, there were many who pitied her, or who affected to do so, for her folly in obviously sacrificing her happiness to rank; while there were not wanting others who laughed at the short-sightedness of the old earl, and prophesied for him a future little flattering to either party.

"A wretched *mésalliance*, to say the least of it," sneered a dowager duchess, with three unmarried daughters; "the girl was well enough as an acquaintance, although it cannot be denied that Lady Mary Brookland has overacted her part by thrusting her into the society where one has met her; but for a man of Lord Downmere's station to *marry* her is really too bad. This levelling system is hateful, and I quite expect that if it is not soon put a stop to, we shall have our sons looking for wives among our dairy-maids."

"My dear duchess," said a gaunt and titled spinster, with the blood of the Bruce in her swollen veins, "I am glad to hear you so hotly denounce these frightful innovations. I have always discountenanced them, and I always shall."

"But you will at least admit, Lady Margaret," interposed a young guardsman, upon whose arm she leant, "that the bride elect is very beautiful."

"I will admit nothing of the kind, Captain Clavering," said his companion, tartly, "she is as pale as a corpse."

"And her diamonds!" exclaimed the duchess, in an accent of affected disgust, "can you imagine such presumption! She plays the peeress a little prematurely; but I suppose they are intended, like the sign before a wayside inn, to give notice of her quality."

"Do not quarrel with her diamonds," laughed Sir Marmaduke Pennefather, who was supposed to be paying his court to one of the three rather mature Ladies Oglander, and who was, consequently, a privileged person, "let her air them while she can, for before long, if I am not greatly mistaken, they will help to cancel one of the long-standing and inconvenient 'obligations' of her noble spouse."

"Oh, is it so?" said her grace, evidently relieved by the inference. "I was not aware that the poor old earl was so deeply involved. I see—I see; well, perhaps he might have done worse under the circumstances. Time will show."

"I wonder," said Lady Margaret Bruce, "if her majesty has heard of the intended marriage, and if so, whether she will condescend to congratulate her. I sincerely hope not, for such a demonstration on the part of royalty would be a dangerous sanction to these unequal, and, I must say, unnatural marriages."

"Her father is well connected, you must remember," again broke in Sir Marmaduke; "the Trevanions are of a good old family, and Mr. Trevanion's mother was the daughter of an Irish earl."

"The man himself is in trade," said the duchess, disdainfully, as she drew her train closer over her arm, "and I shall always be of opinion that such people have no business *here*."

"Your grace must remember that a very high authority declared us to be 'a nation of shopkeepers,'" gaily remarked the baronet.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the Scotch spinster, shrugging her thin shoulders; "does her father really keep a shop?"

Sir Marmaduke laughed, and brushed away a grain of snuff from his embroidered waistcoat, as he replied, "*Il y a*

boutique et boutique, my dear madam, and I really must beg that I may not be quoted as your authority for so uncomfortable a blunder. I know nothing of Mr. Trevanion save by report, and I confess that no rumour has yet reached me of the shop."

"All this is very ridiculous," said the duchess, impatiently, "and I do not know why we should waste so many words upon so insignificant a subject; all that I regret in the business is the fact that as Lord Downmere is an old acquaintance of the duke's, and that their estates lie in the same county, I shall be in some sort compelled to be civil to this *parvenue* peeress, which will, I fear, be a very up-hill and ungracious task."

While this conversation, of which she was the unconscious subject, was progressing in the great saloon, Miss Trevanion had passed into the royal presence and made her curtsy to the sovereign, by whom her reverence was acknowledged by a silent but gracious smile, and where her extraordinary beauty and graceful self-possession had compelled the admiration even of those to whom she was an object of covert envy or of assumed contempt.

As she reappeared in the outer drawing-room, leaning on the arm of Lady Mary Brookland, the first person by whom she was approached was Mr. Plumbtree, at whose side stood a tall, and stern, but noble-looking man, somewhat advanced in years, who bore, as she instantly remarked, a strong likeness to her father. There was the same cold and keen expression in the eye, the same rigidity about the lips, and, above all, the same lowering expression of the brow; and her heart beat quicker as a suspicion crossed her mind that she now looked for the first time upon the long-estranged relative of whom she had heard so much.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Plumbtree, still holding her hand after the first greetings were over, "this is a pleasant moment for me, a very pleasant moment, as I have now the opportunity of making you known to your uncle—or great-uncle, I should rather say—Sir Jasper Trevanion, who is anxious, like the rest of us, to offer to you our

greetings and congratulations. I may transfer this little hand to him, may I not?"

"As freely as I gladly yield it," smiled Ida, with a bright blush of genuine pleasure, as she placed her slender fingers upon the palm which was open to receive them. "I feel honoured and happy that Sir Jasper should desire my acquaintance."

"Who could do otherwise?" was the cordial rejoinder of the baronet; "who could be otherwise than proud of so fair and graceful a kinswoman? and I trust, moreover, Miss Trevanion, that you may prove in deed as well as look the dove which is to bear the olive-branch between me and your worthy father. You cannot be ignorant that circumstances, which it would avail little to recapitulate, have rendered us for years strangers to each other; there may have been, and doubtlessly there was, blame on both sides; he was young, impetuous, and reckless, while I was uncompromising and exacting; but long years have passed over us since we last met; I am an old man now, and anxious to be at peace with all the world; doubly desirous, therefore, to live in amity and friendship with those of my own name and blood. Surely then, Hubert Trevanion will not be more obdurate than myself—but I cannot apprehend that such can be the case with so charming a mediator as the one before me to speak peace between us."

"Believe me, Sir Jasper"—commenced his niece, but she was interrupted in her intended rejoinder by the voice of Mr. Plumbtree, who had been engaged in a conversation with her companion, and who at that moment exclaimed impetuously, "You will excuse me, madam, but I am reluctant to believe such a thing possible—so nearly related,—the last members of a fine old family, who should hang together like ivy-tendrils, and mutually support the proud edifice which it has taken centuries to rear—no, no; I have a better opinion of the good feeling and judgment of my friend Trevanion; and, by-the-bye, madam, allow me the honour of presenting you to Sir Jasper Trevanion, the uncle of your host."

The baronet bowed coldly, and his salutation was as

coldly returned ; when a group of ladies near them having vacated their seats, the little party took possession of them, Sir Jasper still retaining his place beside his niece, and pursuing a conversation which was only interrupted at intervals by the greetings exchanged between Miss Trevanion and her numerous acquaintance.

“ I have but one regret at the present moment,” said the gentleman, courteously, “ and that is, that I am deprived of the gratification of making you known to Lady Trevanion, who was prevented by indisposition from paying her respects to her majesty to-day ; my son, however, is here, and I trust I shall be fortunate enough to present him to his fair cousin, whose favour he is most anxious to propitiate, and whose friendship he would be proud to acquire ; not, believe me, my dear Miss Trevanion, because the busy tongue of rumour has informed him that she will be ere long enrolled among the noblest ladies of the land, but because he has, like myself, for years deplored the feud in our family which has deprived him of the society and regard of so charming a relative.”

“ I am delighted beyond measure, Sir Jasper,” replied Ida, with a glowing cheek, “ that the rumour to which you allude had no influence over his wish for a reconciliation which I should most warmly welcome, as I assure you, and I rejoice that you have afforded to me the opportunity of so doing, that the report in question—for you refer, no doubt, to my supposed engagement to Lord Downmere, has no foundation whatever in truth. The earl is a mere acquaintance, of whom I have hitherto seen but little, and whom it is extremely probable that, after to-day, I shall never see again.”

“ You astonish me, Miss Trevanion, as I had been positively assured in several quarters that your father gave an entertainment this evening in honour of your betrothal.”

“ There will, indeed, be a ball at our house to-night,” replied Ida, with a quivering lip, as her eyes sank and her breast heaved,—“ but excuse me, Sir Jasper, the subject is a painful one.”

“ Not another word, my fair niece, not another word,”

hastily interposed the baronet; "I sincerely grieve that I should have distressed you by any allusion to the subject, nor should I have ventured to do so, had I not heard the marriage publicly mentioned as a thing absolutely and avowedly arranged.—But now you will perhaps permit me to seek my son, who would scarcely pardon me were I to deprive him of so favourable an opportunity of becoming known to you. May I ask you to do me the favour to retain your seat while I thread this labyrinth of plumes and trains? I will endeavour not to detain you long."

Miss Trevanion bowed her assent in silence, for happy as she felt in the hope that this meeting with her relatives might lead to renewal of friendly intercourse between the long-estranged members of the family, she experienced a sensation of relief at the discontinuance of a conversation which agitated and oppressed her.

As the stately baronet rose and moved away, Lady Mary Brookland, whose attention had been so systematically engaged by the pertinacious Mr. Plumbtree, that she had failed to catch the purport of the dialogue which was going on beside her, and who was consequently unaware of the important disclaimer which her fair charge had just uttered, turned towards her with a supercilious smile, and said ironically, "You see, Ida, the magic of a coronet. Whom may you not hope to have at your feet, when the unbending master of Trevanion Hall cannot resist its spell?"

"You are mistaken, madam," said Mr. Plumbtree, emphatically, "and you do Sir Jasper wrong. He is influenced by no consideration of the kind, I can most positively assure you. My friend the baronet is a greater personage in his own county, than any mere titled individual can ever be in this huge metropolis; and whatever may have been the faults or errors of his earlier life, there does not at the present moment exist on earth a kinder or a warmer-hearted man."

"Are you acquainted with Lady Trevanion?" demanded Ida.

"As intimately as plain Mr. Plumbtree can be," said the country gentleman, good-humouredly "and more so, in all

probability, than I should have been, had I not fortunately written M.P. after my name. In short, for I may as well confess to you at once what with your discrimination you will be at no loss to discover when you see husband and wife together, my friend Sir Jasper is not a happy man at his own fireside. Luckily his son is a fine fellow who does justice to his worth ; but a cold hearth, as I trust you will never know by experience, my dear young lady, does not make a cheerful home."

"And this said home-chill has caused an outward expansion of the gentleman's sympathies.—Is not that what you would infer?" asked Lady Mary, in the same accent as she had previously spoken.

"I infer nothing, madam," said Mr. Plumbtree, perfectly unmoved by the offensive manner of her supercilious ladyship ; "I simply state what is the truth, that my friend, probably feeling that, as he had committed a mistake himself, it was quite possible that others might have been equally misled, and that, although his own was irremediable, a remedy might be found for that which was not so, is sincerely desirous to repair the evil in so far as it depends on him to do it ; and that it is with perfect good faith he now seeks a reconciliation with his nephew. It is probable enough, that had he been a happier man, his affections might have centred in his home, and made him less dependent upon the regard and good-will of those beyond it ; but remember, madam, that disappointment too often tends to sour and embitter its victim ; and that he who seeks to exercise his better feelings beyond the pale within which they have been chilled and blighted, deserves some credit for not degenerating into an egotist or a tyrant."

"Here comes my uncle," said Ida, glad of a pretext to terminate the dialogue.

"Aye, and his son with him, I am happy to say," replied his kind-hearted advocate.

"It is time that we prepared to depart," exclaimed Lady Mary, rising ; "our carriage must be up, and if we are not on the spot when it is cried, we shall be detained for another hour."

"One moment, madam," said Ida, firmly; "Sir Jasper has been kind enough to seek my cousin in order to present him, and I cannot be guilty of such an impropriety as to render his trouble unavailing."

"As you please, Miss Trevanion," was the ungracious reply; "but you must have the goodness to remember that if, by volunteering to form a score of new acquaintance without my sanction, you incur the displeasure of your father, you do it deliberately."

"I have no apprehension of the kind, madam," said the young lady, indignantly; "and shall certainly not leave the room until I have been introduced to my cousin."

The noble matron tossed her plumed and turbaned head with the air of one deeply aggrieved, and resumed her seat in silence, as the baronet, followed by his son, succeeded in approaching the party. Ida half rose as they drew near, and extended her hand with graceful cordiality to her young kinsman, who bent low as he received it; while even Lady Mary, angry as she was, could not restrain a feeling of admiration at his superb beauty. Seldom indeed had a more faultless form or figure met her aristocratic and fastidious eye. Of more than average height, nobly proportioned, and gifted with an ease and grace of manner rarely equalled, Sir Jasper's heir had scarcely a rival even in that courtly circle. In face, he resembled his father, but his brow was more lofty, and his eye more open and cloudless; while the smile which played about his lip was at once frank and winning. There was a charm too in his low and manly voice, which accorded well with the peculiar character of his whole appearance; and as Ida met his bright and earnest gaze, her heart swelled with exultation in the firm conviction that her father must gladly and proudly acknowledge his relationship to one so richly gifted by nature as her peerless cousin.

That he had long been the object of Mr. Trevanion's especial aversion, she well knew, but as yet they had never met; nor did she for a moment permit herself to doubt that when their meeting should take place, all feeling of animosity would end at once.

She did not pause to consider that the noble young man before her, stood between her father and the baronetcy to which he had for years aspired.

"I presume, Miss Trevanion," said Lady Mary, at the expiration of a few moments, "that we may now endeavour to leave the palace. The company are rapidly dispersing, and we have already remained too long. We are becoming conspicuous, which is what every high-bred young lady should be careful to avoid."

"I am at your orders, madam," replied Ida, as she passed her hand under the offered arm of her cousin; while her chaperone, still only half appeased, affected not to remark the courteous gesture of the baronet, and possessed herself of that of Mr. Plumbtree; "I am really grieved that I should have detained you so long."

The patience of the noble matron was, however, destined to be still further tested, as, on arriving in the stone hall, they discovered that their carriage was not yet up; and she was consequently compelled to while away the time in conversation with a score of other titled and fashionable *détenues* who were in the same dilemma as herself; while Ida, to whom this meeting with her relations offered a resource from her own painful thoughts, devoted her whole attention to her gratified companions, on whom her grace and beauty had produced a strong and lasting impression.

That his son was the idol of Sir Jasper's heart, she soon discovered; and a sigh escaped her as she remarked the perfect confidence and affection which existed between them. Had she been so loved, so trusted, how different a fate might hers have been! Scarcely could she realise the description which had been given to her of the stern, unbending, domestic tyrant of Trevanion Hall, in the urbane and courtly old gentleman, whose eyes rested upon the face of his child, with a depth of love that could not be mistaken; and as they stood together, amid that brilliant and busy crowd, she forgot the past in the bright and hopeful visions of the future—that future which was even then yawning dark and threatening before her. It was a radiant dream, from which she was only awakened by the hoarse and strained voice of the call-man who announced the carriage;

but she had no sooner parted from her newly-found relatives, and passed the palace gates, than the vision faded, and she was once more flung back upon the sad reality of her position.

By the desire of Lady Mary they were driven home with great rapidity; and on their arrival, her ladyship, merely removing her train, proceeded to inspect the apartments which had been decorated for the fête. In the principal saloon, which had been converted into a ball-room, she encountered Mr. Trevanion, with whom she at once retired to the deep bay of the centre window.

"Were they there?" was the first question of the host.

"Yes and no," replied his companion; "the gentlemen, father and son, were present, but the lady was absent from indisposition—at least, such was the pretext for her non appearance."

"And were they presented to Ida, madam?"

"They were, and the meeting appeared to afford equal gratification to all parties."

"What is the boy like, may I ask?"

"Magnificently handsome. I have seldom seen a finer young man; and had you not, my good sir, conducted matters so ably, I should have advised you to discourage all overtures to a reconciliation, unless you desired to render the family relationship closer than it is at present."

"I require no such inducement to decline it, madam," was the cold rejoinder of the merchant; "but did Sir Jasper hint at anything of the kind?"

"He did more than hint, Mr. Trevanion; he plainly and unhesitatingly expressed his desire to bury the past in oblivion, and to extend the olive-branch, as he practically expressed it, whenever you were prepared to accept it."

"Doubtless; but it is likely to wither by the way. In former years it answered his purpose to expel me from his house—from the home of my ancestors—when I was young and friendless, and required his aid; now that I need it no longer, but am in a position to pay back a hundred-fold the indignities to which I was then subjected, it equally meets his views to court my friendship. He will find, however, that I am a true Trevanion, and made of sterner stuff

than he yet seems to comprehend. We have lived more than half a life strangers to each other, and I at least can well afford to make the estrangement permanent."

"That declaration on your part," said Lady Mary, "reminds me that Mr. Plumbtree—who, *par parenthèse*, fastened himself upon us like a burr,—admitted that Sir Jasper was paying the penalty of an ill-judged marriage; and that the discomfort of a cheerless home had rendered him anxious to terminate the feud between you."

Mr. Trevanion smiled an ambiguous, joyless smile, and remained for a moment silent; after which he asked, "Were you satisfied with Ida's appearance?"

"Perfectly."

"And her engagement?"

"Was the theme of every tongue."

"Did she wear the jewels sent to her by Lord Downmere?"

"She did not."

"Upon what pretext?"

"I asked no questions, as I was not supposed to be aware of their arrival, and she made no remark upon the subject."

"Rebellious still," said the merchant, harshly; "but it will avail her nothing. I have her in the toils."

Lady Mary smiled significantly in her turn, but she made no reply.

"I thank you, madam," said her companion, after a pause; "you have, by your frankness, and friendly sympathy in my interests, rendered me a service for which I shall never cease to be grateful. All things are, I trust and believe, progressing successfully as regards my views for my daughter; while I am at ease on the subject of Sir Jasper. My triumph there is complete, for I can grasp the whole tendency and spirit of his sudden change of feeling. Henpecked by his wife, and checkmated by his nephew, he will do well to return to his county before he makes his discomfiture a theme of gossipry for the clubs, and has his insignificance forced upon him by the former victim of his brutality. Once more, my dear Lady Mary, I offer you my best thanks.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ELOPEMENT.

SELDOM had upholsterers and decorators done their spiriting more effectually than in the villa of Mr. Trevanion; and it was with a feeling of irrepressible exultation that Lady Mary, at the close of her conference with the master of the house, traversed the noble apartments which were already prepared for the reception of the expected guests. The vast hall of entrance was lined with orange and lemon trees, interspersed with minute lamps which, when lighted, gleamed like fire-flies among their rich foliage; while behind and above them rose a thick tangle of vines and other parasitical plants, whose pendant branches were drawn aside at intervals, and formed into a frame-work for the large mirrors which reflected on every side the fairy scene around them. In the centre of the tessellated floor, a fountain of perfumed water threw a sparkling column of liquid light high into the air, which fell back like a shower of silver stars into its porphyry basin, with a soft and soothing sound; and half-a-dozen fine marble statues, partially veiled by flowering shrubs, gleamed out in their pure and classic beauty beneath the overhanging chandeliers, like the guardian spirits of the place. In the ball-room, every niche and recess was filled with the most rare and fragrant exotics, whose parti-coloured blossoms looked like living gems as they glowed beneath the effulgence of the myriad wax-lights which were scattered among them; and the walls were panelled with plate-glass draped by pale green silk. The conservatory which opened from this apartment was richly carpeted, and supplied with divans and couches of crimson velvet; while on pedestals of scagliola and Egyptian marble stood vases of gold-fish, and the gilt cages of innumerable foreign birds of bright plumage and graceful form, over which the shaded lamps threw a soft gleam.

The whole scene was an enchantment. The magic power of wealth, and the wonder-weaving finger of taste, were visible on every side; the eye ached with brightness; and it was almost a relief to pass into the dim and spacious library, with its carved bookcases of dark oak, its precious specimens of the old masters, its cabinets of gems, and its magnificent bronzes. The morning-room of Mrs. Trevanion, from which she had been so reluctantly expelled, and in which she received her guests, was, however, the triumph of the *artiste*; draperied throughout with amber satin, the angles were occupied by pyramids of white lilies, with which the chandelier was also wreathed; but no other ornament was suffered to intrude itself, and the effect was at once simple and striking.

It was with an aching heart that, before she commenced her evening toilette, Miss Trevanion, in compliance with her father's expressed desire, traversed these treasure-laden rooms. She would fain have delayed her entrance there, until the brilliant crowd by which they would in a few hours be filled could distract her attention from the strangeness of their aspect; she would fain have remembered them in after-years in their accustomed and familiar seeming; but this happiness was denied to her, and she passed on, amid strange workmen, and hurrying servants, with a languid step and a joyless spirit. Coarse voices sounded in her ears, ungainly forms crossed her path, coatless men were busy on every side, removing ladders, steps, and stools, while others were engaged in lighting lamps, and rearranging groups of flowers. She gave one long, sad look around her as she stood in her mother's favourite room—that room in which she had first wept, and then dozed away so many hours of her cheerless life. Should she ever again see it as it was? Should she ever again look upon it as it had been when she sat upon her low stool beside her mother's knee, and learnt to lisp out her first prayer? As she asked herself the question, a flood of fond and childish memories burst upon her; in her eyes, the spot which had so long been sacred appeared desecrated, and the gulph, which was soon to separate her from all that she had once loved with the whole fervour of her girlish affection, seemed to have

been widened and deepened by this last mockery of her anguish.

After a while she turned and left the apartment ; nor was it until she had heard the wheels of more than one carriage grate over the gravel beneath her window that she prepared to quit her dressing-room. As she paused for an instant before the glass, she was startled at her own appearance ; she had been weeping unconsciously, and her eyes were swollen and heavy, and her face ghastly pale. "And is it indeed thus that I am to leave my home, perhaps for ever ?" she murmured, sadly. "I would have gone forth rich in a father's blessing, in a mother's love—I would have received their parting kiss in the silence and sacredness of home ; but even that luxury is denied to me. The very roof that was familiar to my infancy, and dear to my youth, even that seems to mock at my misery, and to welcome in my stead the idle votaries of pleasure, many of whom pass beneath it only to fill its echoes with the false words of flattery, and others perchance to scoff. Oh, I am very, very wretched !"

And once more the large unbidden tears fell cold and slow, and she cast herself into a seat, with her face buried in her hands. How long she remained thus motionless, and weighed down by the bitter grief to which she had involuntarily yielded, she knew not, when a burst of music caused her to start suddenly from her chair.

"One more effort," she exclaimed, wildly, "and I shall have done with this false, hollow world for ever."

As she spoke her eye fell upon the caskets which were strewn over her toilette, and which, in accordance with her instructions, Mademoiselle Seraphine had placed there before she dismissed her. With a stern and unnatural composure she opened each in turn, to assure herself that every gem was in its place, and then she added to the heap every ring which she had hitherto worn save one which contained her father's hair, and every ornament of daily use save a small locket containing a miniature of her mother, attached to a slight chain of gold, which she clasped about her neck and concealed beneath the trimming of her dress.

"I cannot part with these," she whispered, hoarsely

"not with these, for none could value them as I have done."

She swallowed a draught of water, and leant for a moment from the window to calm her throbbing brow; and then slowly but firmly, she descended the flower-wreathed staircase, and prepared to join the guests. In the hall she encountered Lady Mary Brookland, who was about to send a servant to summon her, and who exclaimed, in angry amazement, "Are you mad, Ida? Can you really intend to present yourself in such a state as that? Have you no respect for your father's taste and wishes that you make your appearance like a school-girl, in a dress unornamented even by a few paltry flowers? You cannot be serious!"

"Do I look like one who is inclined to jest, madam?" was the bitter rejoinder; "or do you consider that I have cause for mirth, when I see my happiness disregarded, and myself valued only as a puppet to afford sport for others? If you can indeed do so, I envy you alike your philosophy and your strength of mind."

"This is no moment, Miss Trevanion, for so uncalled-for a burst of temper, nor have I time either to analyse or to resent it; while you have already absented yourself too long from your father's guests. Your extraordinary conduct has excited remarks and comments which you would have done well to avoid, but which your new and strange caprice of simplicity cannot fail to increase. However, I have done, since I perceive that my influence over your actions has ceased."

"Lady Mary," said Ida, with sudden agitation, as she extended her hand to her companion, "let no angry feeling come between us to-night. I believe that we should both regret it."

"Be it so," replied the lady, coldly, as she led the way to the reception-room.

Ida nerved herself for the trial which awaited her, but her courage had nearly failed when she observed Lord Downmere, in close and confidential discourse with her mother, whose smiles and diamonds appeared to have as completely metamorphosed her as the hands of hirelings had done her house. Mrs. Trevanion was indeed radiant with

triumphant vanity. The congratulations which had been poured in upon her on the brilliant prospects of her daughter, the compliments which had been lavished upon the splendour of her fête, the movement about her, the lights, the music, the glitter of jewels, the rustling of silks and velvets, and the high-sounding titles which echoed in her ears, had thrown her into a state of excitement, which gave a glow to her usually pale cheek, and lent an unnatural sparkle to her eye.

Striking was the contrast presented by the daughter to whom she owed that brief and passing enjoyment ; and even the earl, who stood in a stately attitude beside his hostess, his jewelled star flashing in the light, started as she approached. The appearance of Miss Trevanion was rather indeed that of a victim prepared for sacrifice than the heroine of a festival. The rich masses of her dark and lustrous hair rendered the brow beneath them of a death-like pallor, and were unrelieved by a single ornament, while her dress of snowy muslin was equally unadorned ; her firmly-set lips were white and rigid, and she moved rather like an automaton than a being gifted with sense and life. As she reached her mother's side, she smiled, and many who were watching her closely never forgot that smile.

Her recognition of the earl was cold and even haughty, and he was evidently disconcerted by so public a demonstration of her indifference ; but with considerable self-possession he endeavoured to render it less conspicuous by addressing to her a murmured compliment, coupled with a reproach that she had not honoured him by wearing the jewels which he had been permitted by her father to offer to her acceptance. Then the statue woke into life, and the modern Pygmalion shrank before the effect of his own presumption. The eyes of Ida flamed, and the hot blood rushed over her brow and bosom.

"Have you yet to learn, my lord," she asked, "that no slave willingly assumes his fetters ? What has been forced upon me I have borne : do not compel me to any other degradation. Is not this enough ?" and she glanced around her hurriedly as she spoke ; "do not try me beyond my strength, or it must fail."

"Madam"—stammered the earl. Ida waved her hand with an impatient gesture, and moved away, leaving her bewildered auditors breathless with consternation.

Gaily sped the moments with the reckless votaries of pleasure who were assembled in honour of Miss Trevanion's betrothal, while the wretched girl herself flitted from one apartment to another like a wandering spirit; a cold and constrained smile upon her lips, and anguish in her heart; she heard not the witching strains of Strauss, she scarcely saw the whirling figures, that enveloped her in light clouds of gauze or gleaming volumes of satin as she made her way among them; to those who sought her hand she pleaded fatigue and indisposition; and while by some the plea, supported by her pale cheeks and drooping eyelids, was readily admitted, there were not wanting many who attributed the singularity of her manner and the simplicity of her attire, to an affectation of importance at which they sneered, as premature and unbecoming in a mere merchant's daughter.

Very different, however, was the effect which they produced upon Mr. Trevanion when his eye first fell upon her. For a moment he doubted the evidence of his senses; but no, there could be no mistake; the noble head, adorned only by its redundant masses of rich dark hair; the exquisite form plainly draped in simple muslin, were indeed those of his daughter, upon whose attire his vanity had lavished ungrudgingly sums which must have sufficed to clothe her like an empress; and, worse than all, evidently shrinking from the observation and homage which on such an occasion she should have courted. The brow of the merchant lowered with mortification and disappointment as he made his way towards her, and there was a concentrated bitterness in the tone with which he said, in a subdued voice, when he reached her side, "This is the crowning insult, Miss Trevanion, and one which I am never likely to forget. Do you owe nothing to the father who has made you the first and highest object of his ambition? Do you hope that I am to be disgraced with impunity by my own child in the eyes of half London? Are you insane? or can you really be unaware that you require but a few blades of straw and

half a dozen withered posies added to your costume, to be a fitting representative of Ophelia?"

"Father," faltered Ida, "I have done you no wrong: I could not add deceit to my other errors. Have you dealt fairly with me? All about me is a brilliant falsehood, but I at least will take no part in it. You cannot ask me to trample upon my own heart."

"Beware, Miss Trevanion," was the threatening rejoinder, as the merchant turned angrily away, "it may now be too late to change your dress, but I advise you to change your countenance, if you would wish me to remember when we next meet that I am still your father."

"When we next meet!" murmured Ida to herself, as he left her side. "How and where shall we indeed meet again!"

Escaping from the heat and hurry of the ball-room, she passed into the dim and deserted library, and threw herself into a seat. The glad sounds of revelry, and silvery voices of women, and, above all, the joyous bursts of music came mingled upon her ear; the odours of a thousand flowers floated upon the air; and still she sat there, motionless as if hewn in stone.

After a time, however, the distant tumult, contrasted with the deep silence immediately about her, produced a bewildering effect upon her over-strained nerves, and suddenly the vast and sombre apartment rang with a peal of wild unnatural laughter; she pressed her hands upon her brow until it ached beneath their tension; and then, hurriedly starting to her feet, she exclaimed, in a voice which sounded strange and unfamiliar even to her own ear,—

"My father is right; this is my bridal fête, and I should do it honour. I wrong Sydney—and wrong myself—by this ill-timed and ill-omened sadness. I will be gay. There will be many a heart besides my own in the crowd whose mirth will be rendered only the more audible from the hollowness within."

Touched by deep passion as by the wand of a magician, Miss Trevanion stood for one moment trembling with fierce and overwhelming excitement; her cheek burned, and her eye flashed with fever; never had she looked so imperial in

her proud beauty Frenzied alike by what she had already undergone, and by what she still contemplated, her pulses throbbed, and her bosom heaved tumultuously. At that moment she could have braved the tortures of the Inquisition, for she was reckless.

As if fearing to trust herself with further thought, she left the library; and when ere long she again entered the great saloon, leaning upon the arm of a casual acquaintance whom she had encountered on her way, the change in her appearance was striking. Every shade of despondency, every symptom of languor had disappeared; and so brilliant was her whole expression that a murmur of astonished admiration met her on every side. Her low graceful laughter, her perfect self-possession, and her eager, animated look, excited the astonishment of all around her; and there were not wanting many in that brilliant throng who envied her for the matchless beauty which made her independent of the adventitious aids of ornament, and who were compelled to acknowledge their own attractions eclipsed and overborne by the unassisted loveliness of the woman, whose pale cheek and subdued deportment had been the theme of malicious comment and ungenerous criticism only an hour previously.

"The quasi-countess has wearied of her sentimental fancy," said a *passée* beauty to her partner, as Ida, radiant with false excitement, took her place in the dance.

"She is right," was the reply, "for she is gloriously lovely now. She scarcely looks like the same person who appeared so languid and listless only an hour since."

"Terribly like temper," retorted the lady, arranging a bouquet upon her dress; "his lordship will find matrimony no sinecure, I fear."

And meanwhile the dance went on, and the grace and elegance of the heroine of the fête were the universal theme of admiration. Lord Downmere, by no means satisfied in his own mind that matters were progressing so satisfactorily as his host had represented, received the compliments which were addressed to him with a constraint that he vainly endeavoured to overcome; and Mr. Treva-

nion, on his side, felt perplexed by an inconsistency of conduct on the part of his daughter of which he had never previously thought her capable. Could his warning have indeed operated thus powerfully upon her? He scarcely ventured to indulge the hope; but it was at all events gratifying to his pride to find how far, even in her present simple attire, she eclipsed the brightest and noblest beauties about her. His brow grew smooth, and his manner bland, as he moved among his guests, drinking in with satisfied vanity the murmurs of pleasure and delight which met his ear on all sides. Nor was Lady Mary less enchanted than himself, as she witnessed the effect produced upon her own five hundred friends, with whom she had, as a matter of course, peopled the brilliant saloons of her host, by the splendour of the entertainment.

"No, no; believe me when I assure you, my dear marchioness," she exclaimed, with ready tact, to a rouged and ringleted dowager who had indulged in a bitter sarcasm on the appearance of the young hostess, "that even your perspicuity is at fault in this instance as regards my little friend. It is from no feeling of covert presumption that she has eschewed the advantages of dress on this occasion, but from a widely different impulse. As Countess of Downmere, she will ere long avail herself, as you will see, of all the splendour of her rank, but to-night she is aware that she is still only Ida Trevanion, and she has acted accordingly."

Did the family friend believe, as she smilingly gave this explanation, that she had discovered the real solution of the enigma? Far from it; but she felt that her own credit was at stake, and she had too much worldly wisdom to confess herself mystified.

It was far otherwise, however, with Mrs. Trevanion, who was, and did not scruple to confess herself, both angry and astonished at the apparent caprice of her daughter. Like all weak people, she attached an undue weight to the opinion and customs of fashionable society, and her mortification was consequently intense when she discovered how absolutely both had been set at defiance by Ida.

"Who would believe, my lord," she said, pettishly, to the earl, who on this occasion considered it expedient to attach himself to his future mother-in-law, "that she was the same person who looked so queenlike at the drawing-room this morning? It is really too bad."

"Miss Trevanion knows the power of her charms, madam," said the antiquated lover, with an uneasy smile, "and you see that her triumph is complete."

"I wish," pursued the lady, who had an unfortunate talent for saying awkward things at the wrong moment, "I do so wish, my lord, she had danced with you instead of Captain Villiers; I am sure that it ought to have been so."

Her noble companion winced, and glanced involuntarily at his gouty foot, which, imprisoned in a shoe that had already more than once reminded him of his infirmity, gave to the absurd lamentation of his hostess all the point of an epigram; and, as he did so, he murmured a reply which was unintelligible.

The day dawned; the birds twittered among the branches, the lark burst into song as it darted towards heaven with its morning thanksgiving; the gray light streaked the river-ripple; and honest labour once more girded itself to battle with the toils of the coming day; and as the world of the artisan and the mechanic woke into life, the rooms of Mr. Trevanion began to thin; and the last languid efforts of the weary musicians were overpowered by the rolling of carriages, the loud voices of servants, and the turmoil of the departing guests; but even these ceased at last, and Mr. Trevanion stood for a moment alone, in the midst of expiring tapers, drooping garlands, and disordered draperies.

"Tell Miss Trevanion," he said suddenly to a servant who was hurrying past him, "that I wish to see her in the library before she retires."

The man hastened to obey his commands, but they were not destined to be fulfilled; in vain did he appeal to her mother, to Lady Mary, and to Mademoiselle Seraphine; not one of them had seen Miss Trevanion for the last hour; in vain did he traverse the conservatory, and the saloons;

wander out into the grounds, and urge others of the domestics to assist him in the search ; the result was disappointment ; and he was at length compelled to return to his impatient master with the unlooked-for tidings that Miss Trevanion was nowhere to be found’

CHAPTER XXI.

MARRIED LOVERS.

ON the southern banks of the Thames, not many miles from London, may be seen from the river a pretty and retired village, backed by a well-wooded hill, at whose summit, as the boat glides on, glimpses may be caught amongst the dense foliage of a noble mansion, at one extremity of the park—for such is the purpose to which the height has been applied—and at the other that of an observatory which overtops the forest timber. Thence the land descends gently to the river, the low-lying grass fields being dotted over their whole surface with browsing cattle ; while only a short distance from the shore stands a picturesque little church, half embowered in ivy, and surrounded by its quiet burial-ground. This modest edifice, upon which an artist eye cannot fail to linger with delight, is also an object of interest to the antiquary from the historical tradition which is attached to it ; and which, from its regal associations, contrasts strangely and startlingly with the simple and unpretending appearance of the building. At the distance of a hundred yards from the church, commences the village street, which stretches along the bank of the stream, in a long line of fishermen’s cottages, where their home-keeping wives drive a small trade in the cheaper produce of their husbands’ nets, and where many a window arrests the steps of the school-going urchin, by its rich stores of sugar-stick, gingerbread, and marbles. Further inland, however, partially, and in some instances, totally hidden from the passer-by upon the river, are to be found in the neighbourhood of

which we write, some of those small but pretty residences which are peculiar to "merrie England;" those sunny pleasant homes where elegance and comfort compensate for space and splendour, and where the refined and gently nurtured, who are debarred the luxuries of wealth, may nevertheless nurse their graceful fancies, undisturbed by those squalid and depressing associations which genteel poverty has to endure in other lands.

It was a lovely evening in autumn; and the glass doors of a small but exquisitely-furnished drawing-room, facing the river, were flung back to admit the various odours of the blossoms with which the flower-pots dotted over the lawn were plentifully filled. The sun was westering, and the sky was rich with fleecy clouds that had caught a roseate hue from the glow of crimson by which he was environed, and which was also reflected upon the calm ripple of the noble stream. From the wooded height, the song of the nightingale had already commenced, while yet more distant might be heard the lowing of cattle from their pastures, mingled with the far-off hum which rose from the peopled river.

Within the apartment, and half shaded by the muslin drapery which had been drawn back to permit her eye to wander over the scene which we have endeavoured to describe, half sitting and half reclining upon a sofa, a chance passer-by might have discovered a lady of surpassing beauty, and at her feet a fair-haired and handsome man, who was gazing up to her with a look of passionate and almost reverential fondness.

The little group consisted of Mrs. Elphinstone and her husband. One happy month had already flitted by since she had given her hand to the man for whom she had abandoned home, and wealth, and parents; and if she sometimes heaved a sigh at the remembrance of the past, it arose from no feeling of regret at the step which she had taken, but was induced only by the resolute estrangemen of her father. Safe in their own happiness, Sydney Elphinstone and his bride had made merry over the marvel ou comments of the public prints, which, with that total wan

of respect for the sacredness of private life that occasionally characterises them, had detailed, more or less faithfully, according to their means of information, the particulars of her elopement. It was, as they well knew, a mere nine days' wonder which would soon be superseded in the public mind by some other marvel; but the relentless silence of those to whom she had been for long years an object of affection, weighed heavily upon her spirit.

"My poor mother," she murmured to herself, "dare not, even if she would, assure me that I am unforgotten and lamented; but my father—can it be that he does indeed find it so easy to abandon me? And Lady Mary—she is, at least, a free agent, and might well have remembered how assiduously she once strove to nurse the passion which she subsequently affected to disavow—and yet all—all have failed me."

"You are sad, dearest," said the young husband, after a silence of several minutes; "speak to me, my love, and assure me that you do not already regret the sacrifice that you have made for my sake."

"Regret, Sydney!" whispered Ida, as she bent forward with a smile, and buried one of her small white hands in the clustering masses of his fair hair: "do I look like one who regrets the past? Have I had cause to do so? Fie on you for the question! But even were it otherwise—even were I less entirely happy than I am,—know me better. I never act without reflection, dearest; and having acted, *I never repent.*"

Elphinstone laughed gaily. "That is a bold assertion, my sweet wife," he said, as he made captive the slender fingers that were toying with his curls, "and one that will render me less anxious when I detect a shadow upon your brow; for I confess that there have been moments when I could not conceal from myself that I had asked, and you had granted, too much."

"So soon!" murmured Ida, beneath her breath.

"But what could I do?" pursued her light-hearted companion, unconscious of her interruption. "I loved you to adoration—I could not live without you—and so, like all

men under similar circumstances I suppose, I consulted only my own selfishness, and dragged you down from your 'high estate' to share my poverty."

"Do *you* ever repent, Sydney?" asked his wife, with a forced smile.

"I may have done so once or twice in the course of my life," was the cheerful rejoinder, "but henceforth I shall have nothing to repent, for you will be my guiding star; and led by such a light I can scarcely fail to walk in the right path."

"Dear Sydney," murmured his wife, as the cloud passed from her spirit, "you need no other monitor than your own noble nature."

"After all, dear one," pursued the young husband, "you must confess that this 'love in a cottage' is very charming; and that a garland of jasmine is lighter to wear than a gilded coronet."

"And the song of that unseen nightingale, Sydney—is it not far sweeter than the warbling of the most gifted *prima donna* who ever threw an audience into raptures? Hark! *There* was a glorious gush of melody; how the air seems to throb beneath its weight."

"I would rather hear your voice than that of the finest nightingale that ever flew."

"Vandal!"

And once more there was silence.

The sun had set, and the moon which had nearly reached its full, was slowly sailing up the heavens; the breeze had fallen, and a long line of light lay upon the water, while countless stars flickered and quivered in the deep blue of the cloudless sky.

It was a glorious evening, redolent of harmony and peace; and very full of intense and absorbing happiness were the two married lovers, who sat with their hands locked in each other gazing almost unconsciously on the scene before them. They had entered their earthly Eden, into which as yet no serpent had glided to blight the flowers upon their path with its venom. Deep and earnest was the affection which filled the breast of each; but far opposed was the nature of that

affection; with Sydney, it was full and perfect, without a doubt or a misgiving; he had won the idol of his heart, and he was proud at once of her, and of his own triumph. Content to dwell among the blessedness of the present, he cared not to look beyond; and when occasionally his thoughts would stray into the future, they were filled with bold and manly determination to wrestle with the world, and to win fame and affluence for the wife who was henceforth to share his fortunes. He never doubted her, he never doubted himself; he possessed, as he had said, youth, talent, and energy, and secure of these he felt strong enough to struggle and to conquer. The radiant being whom he had made his own, must not be deceived in him; ere long he would commence the battle of life with a stout heart and an unflinching resolution; and thus his dreams were all bright and glowing, without one cloud to overshadow them. It was, however, far different with Ida; the very excess of her happiness awoke a feeling of terror in her bosom; she thought not of Sydney toiling to secure for her an affluence of which he would have been careless for himself; she thought only of Sydney estranged by time, and by closer contact with that world in which he would soon be called to play a more active part--of Sydney, young, gay, and flattered, who might learn to feel that he had sacrificed the brightest portion of his life to a fancy of which he might one day weary; and as these painful misgivings forced themselves upon her, the tears which she would not suffer to fall, flooded her heart, and swelled it almost to bursting. The very quality of her love differed essentially from his; there was not the same calm even flow of tenderness, of almost womanly trust and clinging, which was engendered by his frank and open nature; she could not, as he did, live in the present, and yield herself up unresistingly to its charm; deeper and more passionate were the feelings which were hidden within her breast, and by which her whole being was imbued. There were indeed moments when, terrified by the impetuosity of her emotions, she resolutely combated their violence, but the languor which supervened was not repose; and she shrank appalled by the visions of her own imagination as she

pictured to herself the possibility of a change coming over her destiny, and the effect which that change might produce upon herself.

On the evening we have described, however, the calm and soothing aspect of all around her,—the cloudless sky, the rippling river, the silent stars, the mysterious whispering of the leaves, the clear soft moonlight, and, more than all, the fair and placid brow of her husband, had hushed her spirit into profound and gentle peace; and as he sat at her feet with the silvery light gleaming upon his noble countenance, she gazed upon him with a still rapture that laid every other feeling to rest. Like him she was for a time lost in the present; and the very silence around her was eloquent of happiness.

And other days as bright and as beautiful succeeded that soft autumnal night: days throughout which Sydney Elphinstone lived on his unbroken existence of devotion and delight, and in which Ida was also supremely blessed, although a thousand vapours drifted across the haven of her enjoyment which it required all the sunlight of his love to scatter and disperse; but the young husband never dreamt that any cloud had darkened the calm and glorious brow of her he worshipped; neither tone nor look betrayed the inner workings of the troubled spirit which marred its own brightness, and blighted its own peace.

The favourite walk of Ida was a bowery lane, which, gently ascending the hill, formed one of the private roads to the extensive park that occupied its height; where, the owner being absent, Elphinstone had without difficulty obtained permission for his wife and himself to wander at will, a privilege of which they frequently availed themselves. The road terminated in a gothic lodge of unusual size, and considerable architectural beauty, which had at one period been inhabited by a relative of the noble family to whom the estate belonged, and which was, during the residence of the Elphinstones in the neighbourhood, tenanted by a venerable couple, ancient retainers of the lords of the soil, whose old age was made happy by a residence upon the spot endeared to them by long habit and cheerful memories. The worthy dame whose quaint attire and old-world courtesy

were a constant source of interest and amusement to Ida, was on her side delighted with the graceful and elegant young couple for whom she was so frequently summoned to open the jealously-guarded gate ; while the reckless generosity of Sydney had made an equally favourable impression upon her infirm and somewhat morose husband.

It was on a fair fresh morning, a week or ten days subsequent to the period at which we have introduced the newly-married pair to our readers, that they strolled forth, and after a moment of irresolution, finally took once more the way to the gothic lodge. The woods were beginning to betray symptoms of the changing season. A golden gleam had settled upon the beech-trees, which glittered in the sunshine like flakes of gold ; the weeping willows, those spend-thrifts of the shrubbery, were already scattering their leaves to every idle breeze that wandered near them ; while the elms, as though they knew that the time for summer tints had gone by, had assumed a russet hue, as they swayed their branches soberly in the wind. Many of the trees were, however, still gay in their vivid green, the short crisp turf was as fresh and bright as ever ; and the birds as full of song. Gaily the married lovers pursued their way, startled occasionally, as a rabbit or a hare, which their light footsteps had disturbed, darted past them, or a pheasant rose with a loud whirring sound, and escaped into the depth of the woods ; they at length reached the lodge, where they were smilingly welcomed by the venerable gatekeeper.

"I said that you would come to-day, my lady," exclaimed the old woman, exultingly ; "I told my Jonathan that you would be here this blessed morning ; and sure enough, here you are ; but keep to the open turf, for the wood-paths are damp after last night's rain ; and such shoes as yours, ma'am, won't keep out the wet, I take it."

"You are right, good Mrs. Dorcas," said Elphinstone. "My wife"—how he loved the sound of those words, and how proud he looked as he uttered them—"my wife's shoes are not indeed quite adapted for miry paths ; but as she is only just learning to walk, we can scarcely expect her to be very profound on such subjects."

"Aye, aye," replied the old woman, with a significant

nod ; " I understand all about it, I believe, sir. Well, well ; we can't put old heads upon young shoulders, as the saying goes ; and if she is only half as good as she is handsome—and I for one don't doubt it——"

" You are right, Mrs. Dorcas, you are quite right," said Sydney, seizing her hand, and shaking it heartily ; "*quite* as good as she is handsome, and that ought to satisfy any man."

" To be sure it ought, sir ; and at all events it satisfies you, there can be no mistake about that ; and your lady may own the same on her side ; for, as my old man and I often say, you are the handsomest couple we ever set *our* eyes on, and we've seen a many of the quality too, in our time."

" Better and better !" laughed Elphinstone. " Why, Mistress Dorcas, you are a perfect courtier, and ought not to be buried alive here."

" Well, it has been dull enough all this summer, I do confess, sir," said the garrulous old gate-keeper ; " but just now I am in luck, and may hope for a better time."

" Ha, indeed ; then I suppose your lord is coming back to England ?"

" Oh, dear no, sir ; my lord and my lady intend to winter in Rome, and even if they were to change their minds, they'd stay in London, I take it ; or go down to their other place westward, for they never fancy this in the cold weather, being so near the river. No, but I have let all the best rooms in the lodge for the next six months, so that we shan't be so lonesome-like as we were last year."

" A strange season, I should say," observed Sydney, " for a family to select so secluded a residence."

" Why, it ain't altogether a family," said the old woman, gravely, " it's only a widow lady and her daughter ; a grand lady too, I rather think, sir, to tell you the truth, but I fancy they are not over rich, for all that."

" Few people are, my good friend," remarked Ida, with a smile, as she prepared to walk on, fearful of intruding upon the secrets of a stranger.

" True, ma'am, true," acquiesced the pertinacious old woman ; " but some's richer than others ; and I've a notion that this lady that's coming to lodge with me is poorer than she has been."

"In that case, Mistress Dorcas, you had better take care of yourself," said Sydney, archly.

"Oh, I've no fear for myself, sir," replied the gatekeeper, eagerly; "no fear for myself, for the lady behaved like a lady as she is, and offered to pay me three months in advance."

"But, surely," objected Ida, interested in spite of herself by the animation of her humble acquaintance, "you can scarcely have such accommodations as would be required by so superior a person as you describe, in your present residence?"

"I don't wonder that you should think so, ma'am," said Mrs. Dorcas, "because, of course, you can't be aware that a maiden aunt of my lord's lodged and died here, and the rooms have never been touched since, except to be dusted. My lord would have it so; and handsome enough they are, I can assure you, ma'am, for any lady in the land."

"Well, at all events, I congratulate you, my good Mrs. Dorcas," said Elphinstone, as he drew the arm of his wife within his own; "and now we will continue our rambles. But, by-the-bye, when do you expect these new inmates of yours?"

"Oh, they have already been here these three days, sir," was the reply, "or I would have asked your lady to look at Lady Margaret's rooms. They are out somewhere in the park; they are very little in the house this fine weather."

"They are right," was the gay rejoinder; "and now we will go into the park in our turn. We are not likely to interfere with each other, as in all probability we shall not even meet."

"Likely enough, sir; but if you should, there will be no harm done."

"I trust not, my worthy dame; so we will wish you good morning for the present."

"Good morning, sir, and a pleasant walk to you," was the reply of the old woman, as she turned the key in the gate, and re-entered the lodge, while Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone resumed their walk.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RENCONTRE.

FOR awhile the two pedestrians followed the advice of Mrs. Dorcas, and kept in the open ground ; but after a time they began to wish for the calm seclusion of the woods, and plunged into their welcome shade. Fond and happy hearts make society and fellowship with all around them ; the sunshine within gives warmth and gladness to every external object ; and thus the moments flew by with lightning speed, until Ida, who was not yet sufficiently inured to this species of exercise to set fatigue at defiance, began to betray evident symptoms of over-exertion.

"We have walked too far and too fast for you, my love," said Sydney, as he felt her weight grow heavy on his arm ; "and we must make our way back in the open park where you may rest for a time without danger of damp, which you cannot unfortunately do under this dense foliage ; and see, most opportunely, here is a path cleared through the trees which evidently leads to the observatory. What say you ? Can you make the effort ?"

Ida willingly assented, and in a few moments they discovered by the bright gleam of light which appeared at some distance before them, that they should ere long be in the open grounds once more. Cheered by the prospect of repose, Ida moved more rapidly forward, and they soon stood at the edge of the belt through which they had ascended the height. The prospect before them was enchanting, and weary as she was, Mrs. Elphinstone remained for a few instants looking far out over the busy river and the opposite shore ere she had taken possession of the grassy knoll upon which her anxious husband had hastily thrown the shawl which she had cast off during their ramble. She had scarcely seated herself, however, ere she became aware that the scene had fascinated other eyes besides her

own, for beneath the shadow of the tower, where she was protected from the glare of the sun, sat a young girl, so assiduously engaged upon a sketch which she was making, that she was evidently unconscious of the vicinity of strangers.

"Look, Sydney," whispered his wife, "you were a false prophet, for most assuredly we have stumbled upon the young lady of the lodge."

Elphinstone's eyes followed the direction of her finger, for hitherto he had been so absorbed in his care for her that he had not once glanced around him; and he immediately acquiesced in the probability of her inference.

"Judging from her figure at this distance," he whispered in reply, "she must indeed be very young; scarcely, I should say, escaped from childhood, with all its glorious associations of back-boards and milk-and-water. Who *can* they be?"

"Nay, love," said Ida, with the uneasy feeling which the subject of age never failed to produce upon her, and who was morbidly anxious to conceal it, "you must, at least, acknowledge, whoever they may be, that the figure before us is extremely graceful—remark the pliant bend of her neck, and the firm but easy attitude of her small head. She is really a very picturesque object as she sits there enveloped in those profuse folds of white drapery, with her long golden ringlets heaving in the wind."

"I will acknowledge anything you please, dearest," said Sydney, as he wound his arm affectionately about her waist, "if you will only lean on me, and endeavour to overcome the fatigue to which I have subjected you through my selfish want of thought; and really now you mention it, the fair damsel before us here, does make a very pretty object in the landscape. It is a pity that she cannot put herself into her sketch."

"How strange that she should be alone at such a distance from the lodge," pursued Mrs. Elphinstone.

"You forget," said her husband, "that this is charmed ground, upon which only the privileged can enter; and that she doubtlessly imagined herself as free from our intrusion as we believed ourselves secure from meeting her."

And still the subject of their conversation pursued her task without once suffering herself to be diverted from her occupation ; while at intervals, a few snatches of song burst from her lips, in a clear, wild, thrilling voice of exquisite volume and sweetness.

"Another nightingale, Ida," smiled Sydney ; "upon my word, the neighbourhood improves : who would have thought of encountering such a little prodigy as this in a country village ?"

"Hush," murmured his wife, "she is not alone, for I see another figure advancing towards her from behind the observatory."

As Mrs. Elphinstone spoke, a lady habited in mourning moved forward into the sunshine for a moment, and then, closing a book which she held in her hand, slowly approached the young artist.

"Let us go," said Ida, springing to her feet, "let us go at once, Sydney, for we cannot fail to be observed ere long ; and I would not for the world that we should be suspected of the indelicacy of listening to their conversation."

"But can you indeed venture on further exertion so soon, my beloved ?" asked her husband, anxiously ; "you have scarcely had time to overcome your previous fatigue."

"Fear nothing for me," smiled Ida, "I really feel quite strong again ; and I know not why, but I shall be glad to escape unseen by these strangers."

"Unfortunately, that is impossible," said Sydney, "unless we return through the wood, which would lengthen our walk very considerably, and you are unequal to any gratuitous exertion of that kind. Pass them we must ; and therefore if you are really desirous to reach home without delay, let us lose no more time."

With a reluctance for which she could not account to herself, and which she was consequently unwilling to confess, Mrs. Elphinstone took the arm of her husband, and prepared to retrace her steps to the village.

Had she entertained a hope of being enabled to sustain the fatigue of the more circuitous woodland path, she would assuredly have found courage to make the attempt, but she felt her utter inability to accomplish such an undertaking ;

and she shrank from the possibility of failure, should she persist in a caprice which could not but appear childish and undignified to Sydney.

Slowly, therefore, they advanced towards the two strangers, who were so thoroughly engrossed in discussing the merits of the drawing upon which the younger had been engaged, that the muffled sound of the intrusive footsteps upon the grass were unheard; nor was it until Elphinstone, in order to announce their approach, addressed a few words to his companion, that they became aware of this invasion of their solitude, when the effect which it produced was electrical.

The young girl started like a frightened fawn, and suffered her sketch-book to fall to the ground; while the elder lady hastily drew down her veil.

The first impulse of Sydney was to drop the arm of his wife, to raise his hat with a murmured apology, and to restore the sketch-book to its fair owner; after which he turned away, and, holding the hand of Ida, was about to pursue his homeward path, when he was arrested by the exclamation, —

“I cannot be deceived—that must be Mr. Elphinstone.”

“It is indeed Mr. Elphinstone,” was his astonished reply, as he once more advanced towards the tower accompanied by Ida, “and the voice of the person by whom I am recognised is perfectly familiar to me, although I am unable to identify it.”

“My dear boy,” said the lady, throwing back her veil, and revealing a careworn but still handsome face, “this is indeed an unexpected meeting;” and she extended her hand cordially as she spoke.

“My dear Lady Malcolm,” exclaimed Sydney, in his turn, “what an unlooked-for pleasure! What happy chance has brought you to this *ultima Thule*?”

Lady Malcolm pointed in silence to her mourning dress, and then, for the first time, the eye of Elphinstone fell on her widow’s cap.

“Forgive me,” he said, in a tone of deep feeling, “I did not know—I was not aware——”

“Yes, Sydney,” replied the lady, after a pause, “he is

gone ; and the world would have been to me a desert, had I not still possessed my child. Come hither, Edith," she pursued, beckoning the timid girl to her side, "give your hand to Mr. Elphinstone, whose mother was, as you have often heard me say, my best and dearest friend."

"Can it be possible," asked Sydney, as he took the offered hand, and retained it within his own, "can this really be my little Edith ? my little golden-haired pet and plaything ? Time does indeed work wonders—and very charming ones at times," he added, glancing towards her mother.

"But — this lady—" said Lady Malcolm, with a courteous bow to Ida, who had hitherto remained a mute spectator of the scene before her.

"That lady," said Sydney with a proud and beaming smile, "is my wife, my dear Lady Malcolm, for whom I would ask a portion of the regard with which you honoured my poor mother."

"Your wife !" exclaimed the widow, in irrepressible amazement ; "are you serious, Sydney ?"

"Perfectly so," replied the young husband, with sudden gravity ; "you may well wonder at my happiness, Lady Malcolm, for it is indeed far beyond my deserts ; but nevertheless, this lady is indeed my wife."

"Yours is in truth an enviable destiny, Sydney," said his friend, subduing with ready tact the feeling of surprise which had for a moment betrayed her into a want of caution peculiarly ill-timed ; "but you were ever a creature of the sunshine. Remember, that not a word of this had reached me ; and you are still so young that you needed the all-sufficient excuse of such a face as that before me to reconcile me to the fact of your marriage. Pardon me, Mrs. Elphinstone," she continued, with a winning smile, "I have for so many years been accustomed to look upon your husband in the light of a son, that I was weak enough for an instant to feel aggrieved that he had taken such a step without honouring me with his confidence."

Ida replied only by a cold and haughty inclination of the head. She was stung to the very heart.

"Had I only been aware that you were in England, my kind friend," exclaimed Sydney, "how many painful moments

would have been spared to Ida! but the tale which I have to tell is too long to be commenced here, and now; and my wife is already exhausted by her walk."

"Let us then return to the lodge together," said Lady Malcolm, "for you will be surprised, Sydney, to hear, that the two stray birds you have discovered on the wing, have made their humble nest for a time on the confines of a great man's park. Such is, however, the case; but I must not forget that my sorrows and struggles can afford but sorry entertainment to Mrs. Elphinstone; and I will therefore defer all further allusion to them until we are alone together; and in the interval, endeavour to make her husband's friend her own. May I not hope to do so, my dear madam? Such a face as yours gives promise of a heart in which I should be proud indeed to occupy a place. I am no longer young, but I can still feel with those who are so."

The voice and manner of Lady Malcolm were so irresistible, that Ida turned towards her with a smile; and ere long she found herself conversing unrestrainedly, and with a sensation of positive pleasure, with the stranger from whom she had only an hour before so unaccountably shrunk. She even ceased to remember her first ill-omened expression of surprise on discovering that she was the wife of Sydney; or rather she brought herself to interpret it according to the explanation which Lady Malcolm had volunteered.

Elphinstone was, meanwhile, radiant with delight; and was astonished to discover that, although in the society of his idolized wife, he had never for a moment experienced the want of other companionship, his happiness was sensibly enhanced by this unexpected meeting with an old and valued friend.

The shy and beautiful Edith also interested him greatly. It seemed to him so marvellous, that the laughing child in whose sports he had shared, should in the four brief years which had elapsed since they last met, have grown into a graceful and lovely girl, full of the blushing beauty of her sixteen summers; but, above all, he felt exalted in his own esteem as he remembered, that it was his proud privilege to introduce to one whom his mother had loved as a sister, so radiant a being as Ida in the character of his wife.

"And when she knows all," he resumed, "when she learns all that she has sacrificed for my sake, how will she honour her for her noble self-abnegation: how perfect a faith will she feel in her deep and pure affection for the man to secure whose happiness she has abandoned all besides!"

On the arrival of the party at the lodge, the astonishment of Mrs. Dorcas exceeded all bounds; and it was with an unsteady hand that she applied the key, which was to give egress to Elphinstone and his bride; she became more tranquil, however, as the parting salutations fell upon her ear.

"Farewell then, Lady Malcolm, until to-morrow; good bye, Edith; remember that you have promised that I shall see the sketch, and that we shall between us introduce Ida into the foreground."

"Good morning, my dear boy;—good morning, Mrs. Elphinstone. We shall meet again to-morrow."

The gate closed upon Sydney and his bride; but Lady Malcolm paused for a moment ere she entered the lodge, and watched them as they slowly made their way along the bowery road.

"Married!" she mentally ejaculated; "married at twenty years of age; poor boy!—and to a woman evidently older than himself. Who was she, I wonder? She is beautiful—very beautiful—high-bred, and highly educated—but what brings them here? This may indeed be a refuge for the struggling and the sorrowful, but it is no fit resting-place for the prosperous and the happy. There is a mystery which I must strive to fathom, for both their sakes. And so the hope of long years has failed! I loved *his* mother so tenderly, that I could not but believe that he, in his turn, must love *my* child when he again met her—beautiful and gifted as she now is. However, I will think no more of this, but endeavour to convince myself, that the more brilliant destiny which is offered to her may equally ensure her happiness; and, meanwhile, for the sake of the friend who was so dear to me, I will strive to feel the affection of a mother for the woman who now bears her name."

At this point of her reverie, Lady Malcolm was interrupted by the sweetest sound to her ear of any which could

be heard on earth—the voice of her child carolling forth a simple song with all the gushing careless freedom of a wild bird ; and with a sigh and a smile strongly blended together, she retired into the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

“AND now pray tell me, Sydney,” said his wife, as they slowly proceeded homewards, “who is this Lady Malcolm?”

“In the first place, dearest, as you must have gathered from our conversation, she was the most intimate and best-loved friend of my mother, by whom she was at once esteemed for her many noble qualities, and admired for her extraordinary attainments. She is in truth an excellent and large-hearted woman, of strong purposes and feelings, and singularly accomplished; one of the last persons in the world, I should have thought, to bury herself alive as she is about to do here, under any circumstances, even the melancholy one which must have induced the sacrifice.”

“But she must have been a widow for some time,” remarked Ida, “for you saw that, with the exception of a black ribbon about her waist, Miss Malcolm wore no mourning.”

“True,” said Sydney ; “and that fact renders her present absolute seclusion still more unaccountable. However, in reply to your inquiry, I must further tell you, that Lady Malcolm was the only daughter and heiress of Mr. Mark Conyngham, a man of very considerable fortune and large landed property.”

“It cannot then be, that straitened means have decided her to take so singular a step?” interposed Mrs. Elphinstone.

“Certainly not, I should imagine ; or if so, something very peculiar must have occurred. Be this as it may, however, Miss Conyngham, the beauty and the heiress, bestowed her hand upon the colonel of a Dragoon Regiment which

chanced to be quartered in the county town adjacent to her father's estate ; who, in process of time, became Sir Archibald Malcolm ; a man of high family connections and considerable military reputation. It was what is called a 'love match' on both sides ; but I have heard my poor mother say that the gallant colonel won new laurels by this fresh conquest in the county, where there had been many pretenders to the hand of his fair and well-dowried bride, who could not conceal their discomfiture at her being carried off by a stranger, even although that stranger was the brilliant and gallant Colonel Malcolm."

"And were they happy?" demanded Ida, earnestly.

"So I have heard ; in fact they had every reason to anticipate happiness, they were so well matched in every respect—both wealthy, both highly endowed by nature, and both young and full of hope."

"You are right," said Ida, with an ill-suppressed sigh ; "in that case, indeed, they might well anticipate happiness, for in that instance there could be nothing to reproach on the one hand, nor to regret on the other, in after-years."

"And I would pledge myself that neither regret nor reproach ever came between them," replied Sydney, emphatically ; "why should it? Had they not chosen each other from the whole world, even as we have done, my best beloved? No, no ; from all that I have heard, Sir Archibald and Lady Malcolm were just such a model couple as we shall be ; realising the sweetest words ever written by one of the sweetest poets who ever wrote ; and I will be bound that more than once he has said and sung to her what I will say and sing to you ;" and as he bent down and looked into the eyes of his wife, Elphinstone breathed out in a subdued but exquisitely melodious voice :

"Thou wilt still be adored as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will ;
While around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Shall entwine itself verdantly still."

"Are you already looking forward to that period, Sydney, and prepa ing yourself to meet it with philosophy?" asked Ida, with a shade of impatient bitterness.

"What a question!" exclaimed Elphinstone, gaily; "am I looking for a gouty shoe, and a bowl of water-gruel? No, no; my philosophy is of quite another description, and consists of enjoying the present to the fullest extent of which it is susceptible, and of looking into the future only to foretaste all the happiness that I have reason to expect from it. So now that we have settled that important point, which you must have mooted in the mere insolence of a beauty that will remain for a century to come unchanged and unchangeable in my eyes, let us return to our text.

"Lady Malcolm accompanied her husband abroad, and did not return to England until she had become a mother. Edith was at the period of their arrival a mere infant, and I, a boy of four years of age, became her first playfellow; after a time we both grew a few inches, she found the use of her feet, and we drew carts and made cowslip necklaces together, until I was banished to school, and thence to college, and entirely lost sight of my little companion, who was in the meanwhile undergoing the same process with some slight variations. You may therefore understand my astonishment to-day on discovering in the lovely girl who had excited so much interest in us both, the fairy thing that I only remembered as a wee toddling laughter-loving child."

"Yes, time works strange changes," said Ida, gravely, "and she is certainly very beautiful."

"And what a voice!" pursued Sydney; "those recreant rooks ought to have been ashamed to caw in her hearing; and did you remark the sketch, dearest? As an artist you must have considered it masterly for so young a girl."

"It was very creditable indeed," said Mrs. Elphinstone, who began to weary of the praise bestowed by her husband upon another, but who was too right-minded to utter one word of depreciation. "Miss Malcolm will make a charming wife for the man who is fortunate enough to win her."

"A wife!" echoed Sydney, with a laugh, "what! that shy child! My dear Ida, what an absurd idea!"

"I do not see its absurdity, I confess," persisted his companion; "if I do not err in my calculation, Miss Malcolm must be sixteen years of age."

"Well, I suppose she is," was the calm rejoinder; "but

it really sounds so strangely to hear you call her Miss Malcolm, though I suppose that it will be proper to do so myself in future, in order to show all fitting honour to the 'little Deethy' of old times, who, as you say, has now reached the ripe and respect-compelling age of sixteen."

"After all," murmured Ida, "I must confess that, charming and accomplished as these strangers are, I would much rather that our solitude had continued uninvaded."

"I, at least, have never felt it to be solitude," said Sydney, fondly; "*my* world is always amply peopled when you are by my side; but nevertheless, a thousand pleasant memories have rendered their presence welcome to me; green, fresh memories which bring back the happy years of my boyhood, and make me feel as though I had still a mother and a home."

Mrs. Elphinstone was silent; and for a time her husband remained buried in thought: while at intervals a smile played about his lips, and at others a deep shade of sadness settled upon his brow. Suddenly, however, he started from his reverie.

"But why should I look into the past," he said, "when I have only cause to exult over the present?"

"Yet, a mother—a home—" faltered the self-tormenting Ida, who was jealous even of his back-glancing thoughts.

"True, they are both very dear to me," was his reply; "but have I not a loved and lovely wife to replace the first, and the wide world before me in which to renew the last? Where the heart lingers, there is our true home; it is only separation from the beloved one which makes man an exile and a wanderer."

"And would it not be prudent to make that home ere long, dear Sydney?" asked his wife, once more appeased. "We must not forget that we are poor; the Midsummer-day's dream in which we have hitherto indulged cannot last for ever; and we should do well to prepare for the inevitable awakening."

"My dear girl!" exclaimed Elphinstone, deprecatingly, "who is looking gloomily into the future now? I am actually inclined to scold you. Are you already weary of our miniature paradise in this quiet little nook? I shall

indeed begin to fear that you have truly discovered it to be a solitude."

"Then you will do me an injustice, Sydney; my only dread is, that you may yourself soon learn to feel it one. It is necessary, even amid such happiness as our own, that, like the mother of Aladdin in the eastern story, we should rub up the old lamps of our fancies, at times, in order to exchange them for new ones. *Toujours perdrix*, however savoury the diet may at first prove, runs a sad risk of becoming wearisome at last, particularly to one so young as you are."

"That is scarcely fair, Ida, either to yourself or me."

"And wherefore? The fact may be unpalatable, but can you deny its truth?"

"Gastronomically, no; but morally, yes—certainly, in so far as I am personally involved in the question."

"Well, then," persisted Mrs. Elphinstone, "we will, for the sake of argument, suppose that you really could be content to dream away your life with no companion but your wife, and no pursuit but that of making the days succeed each other in a species of listless enjoyment——"

"Ida, I cannot understand you."

"And yet, love, I speak plainly; even could you, I repeat, be satisfied with such an existence as that which I have attempted to describe, I must not suffer you to forget that I came to you almost penniless, and——"

"Ida," interposed her husband, vehemently, "that you became mine under any circumstances was an amount of happiness of which I feel myself to have been unworthy; too well do I comprehend the extent of the sacrifice to which your affection prompted you; but only give me time, and you shall see how jealously and perseveringly I will struggle to repay the debt. Surely, however, you are premature in seeking thus early to commence our combat with the world. We are so happy here, shut out from all the cark and care by which we shall be surrounded when we have once made the plunge."

Elphinstone was another proof, had any such been needed, that men have infinitely less practical philosophy than women. The sudden necessity for exertion, after

years of ease and self-indulgence, shakes a man to the very centre of his soul; he has to break through all his old and cherished habits, to immolate his fastidious refinement at the shrine of mammon, and to jostle his way to the feet of the idol among the coarser worshippers in whom the crowd excites emulation rather than disgust; his sensitive nature revolts at the trial before him, and he becomes helpless under the failure of his moral courage; while a woman, however delicately nurtured and constitutionally timid, no sooner becomes aware that the struggle must be made than she is aroused into strength and action; she may weep and repine under slight sorrows, but she contends resolutely with a great trial.

Man looks gloomily upon the storm-cloud, but woman gazes out into space to discover the rainbow beyond it. Man is cowed by the positive, woman sustained by the possible. He cowers beneath the actual infliction, while she, even though it be amid tears and travail, persists in struggling for its remedy.

The sudden energy displayed by Mrs. Elphinstone had, however, as we are compelled to confess, been elicited by a mixed motive of which she herself was scarcely conscious. It is true that the reflections to which she had given utterance during that homeward walk had frequently arisen in her mind in her happiest hours, but it is equally certain that not even on the previous day had she entertained the most remote intention of forcing them so abruptly on her husband; one short hour had, however, sufficed to create a revolution in her whole being; the apparition of Lady Malcolm and her daughter; the expressed admiration of Mr. Elphinstone for the graceful girl who had been the playmate of his childhood, the unguarded expression used by the elder lady, and her evident influence over the feelings of Sydney, all conspired to render his wife anxious to avoid any further intercourse with the intruders.

A new interest had been awakened in the heart over which she sought to reign supreme; mutual confidences must be exchanged upon subjects with which she was wholly unconnected; her privacy was invaded; the sensation of blissful security in which she had indulged was

gone; the besetting sin of her nature was once more aroused; and the fatal jealousy to which she yielded herself up a passive victim, was busy with its prey. Ida was very wretched, but she did not ask for rest, she only pined for change.

And who among us can ever foresee what the next change may bring?

CHAPTER XXIV

A VISIT.

ON the following morning, while Mr. Elphinstone was occupied, according to his usual custom, in selecting a bouquet for his bride on her appearance in the breakfast-room, Ida lingered over her simple but elegant toilette. The expression of her features was calm but sad, and it was evident that her thoughts were far from the scene and object by which she was surrounded.

She had dismissed her maid, and sat opposite the large mirror, wrapped in a loose dress of pale blue cachmere, over which her magnificent hair fell in luxuriant profusion almost to the floor. Her head rested upon her hand, and her eyes were fixed upon the ground.

"Yes—I see, I feel, that my trial is now about to commence," she murmured to herself; "and yet, of what have I a right to complain? I was not forced to the brink of the precipice upon which I stand; I chose my own path, and must endure the consequences of my own rashness. There will be no pity for me, none, should I become the victim of my vain and selfish imprudence; and it is better so, for I do not seek for pity, and could not brook it. And yet I love him so deeply—I *do* love him so entirely and so intensely, that surely I deserve to be loved in my turn with more than mere evanescent passion. For the moment I am his world, for months I have been the one dream of his existence; but is not life one perpetual series of change and chance?"

“How many women have been worshipped with equal devotion for a brief period; then slighted, and ultimately forgotten! There are a hundred deaths comprised in those two fearful words. And he is so young, so very young! Who shall say that the fancy of his youth will continue to be the passion of his manhood? Who shall say that the poverty and the stern contact of the world may not do their hideous work, and wrench from me the heart whose every struggle for freedom will cost me tears of blood? And he is so beautiful in his boyish strength and grace; must not others look upon him with the same tenderness and admiration that I have done? Others younger, and, before many years shall have gone by, fairer and brighter than myself. Oh, Sydney, should this ever come to pass——”

Her bosom heaved convulsively, and her lips trembled, as for an instant she dwelt upon the image evoked by her jealous fears; but she was suddenly awakened to the realities of her present existence by the full rich voice of her husband, which came to her through the open casement, as he accompanied his graceful task by singing beneath her window—

“Oh! there’s nothing half so sweet in life
As love’s young dream.”

She raised her head, a smile stole over her features, and concealing herself behind the window-draperies, she watched him as he wandered from flower-bed to flower-bed, selecting with a fastidiousness which sent a glow even to her heart, the fairest and richest blossoms that they could boast.

After indulging for a time in this contemplation, she hastily rang for her woman, betrayed an unusual interest in the arrangement of her dress, gazed long and anxiously into the mirror, and finally joined her husband radiant with beauty and happiness.

“At last!” exclaimed Sydney, springing impetuously to meet her; “but, laggard as you have been, my best beloved, I have not the heart to chide you; the time has been well bestowed, for never did I see you look more lovely. What will Edith say to-day, when she whispered to me yesterday

that you were the most beautiful creature she had ever seen? What will Lady Malcolm think of my presumption if she could scarcely credit it when she saw you worn and weary with a fatiguing walk, and could scarcely, even then, believe that you were really mine?"

And as he spoke, Elphinstone wound his arm tenderly about the waist of his wife. The question was, however, an unhappy one, for, as we have seen, Ida had at once attributed the incredulity of Lady Malcolm to a far different cause; and a shadow passed across her face which even the constrained smile upon her lips could not conceal, and she asked, with an attempt at playfulness—

"And why should you attach any importance to the effect which I may or may not produce upon your friend and her daughter?"

"Why!" echoed Sydney; "can you ask me why, when you know the exultation that I feel when I know you to be admired and appreciated by all who approach you, and remember that you are mine, that I have won you to my heart, and may hold you there for ever?"

"Foolish boy!" murmured his wife, tenderly; "but I suppose that I must not quarrel with such a feeling, although it is one in which I cannot sympathise."

"Ida, my love, what mean you?"

"Simply, dear Sydney, that my love for *you* is so utterly independent of all extraneous excitement, nay, I will even say, so self-engrossed, that I would rather that no one should look upon you with the same eyes that I do."

Elphinstone answered with a peal of his own joyous laughter.

"Believe me when I assure you that I do not jest," said Ida, gravely.

"And believe me, Mrs. Elphinstone, when I assure you that you need be under no apprehension of the kind," replied her husband, as he wreathed a white camellia in the braids of her hair; "depend upon it that your sun is scarcely a star to any other eye than your own. There, now you are perfection; and you will leave that flower where I have placed it; will you not, dearest?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Sydney; but remember that your friends proposed to pay us an early visit, and that we have not yet breakfasted."

"Ah, true; so we will only indulge in one more stroll through the flowers, and then abandon them for a time. I do so hope that you will like Lady Malcolm, Ida."

"You know that I am slow in attaching myself, Sydney."

"You are right," said her husband, bending down to look into her face; "I know it well; hours and hours of torture did I suffer, before you allowed me to believe that you cared more for me than for the most indifferent of your acquaintance."

"And do you blame me, Sydney?"

"Blame you! I cannot accomplish impossibilities. I should not know how to blame you if I desired to do so."

"In that case at least you would have done wrong," said Ida, with a faint smile; "I saw and felt——" she paused

"What?" asked Sydney, eagerly.

"Nay, do not urge me," was her reply: "suffice it that you learnt the truth at last. And now let us return to the house."

"Charming!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, as she possessed herself of the bouquet which lay beside her plate, and presented her cheek to receive the kiss of her husband; "I really begin to imagine, Sydney, that the flowers reproduce themselves every night, in order to be gathered and blended so gracefully every morning. Why, this is a fit offering for an eastern queen."

"It is far better bestowed," said her gratified husband, as he seated himself near her, "for it now adorns my wife; and I repeat, Ida, that I never saw you look so radiantly beautiful."

"Flatterer!" said Mrs. Elphinstone, "you will almost make me vain; but in truth, dear Sydney, I would not exchange these glorious blossoms, which you have so skillfully arranged, for the most costly gems that you could offer me."

The sun was shining brilliantly, and all nature was redolent of beauty and brightness. Ida was perfectly, supremely

happy; she had even forgotten for the time the gnawing doubts and bitter anticipations in which she was so prone to indulge.

With her eyes fondly and tenderly fixed on the glowing and manly face of her young bridegroom, whose luxuriant curls were raised at intervals from his brow by the breeze that came through the open glass doors by which they had entered from the garden, while his large luminous eyes danced in the light of the heart's happiness, her whole being was flooded with a quiet and absorbing joy; when suddenly steps were heard on the gravelled sweep that led up to the house, and Lady Malcolm and her daughter emerged from behind the belt of flowering shrubs, which had hitherto concealed their approach.

"So soon!" murmured Ida, roused from her happy reverie.

"Welcome! a thousand times welcome!" exclaimed Sydney, as he bounded across the verandah to receive the coming guests; and as his wife rose slowly from her seat, she saw him grasp in his extended hands those of the mother and daughter, with a warmth which to her appeared exaggerated and uncalled for.

No trace of this feeling was, however, perceptible as she greeted with calm and high-bred grace the friends of her husband; and the heart of Elphinstone beat high as he detected the gaze of unequivocal admiration which Lady Malcolm fastened upon the lovely woman who stood before her.

"We are sad intruders, I fear, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," she said, courteously, "and visit you at a most untimely hour, but my affection for your husband would not permit me to use anything like ceremony towards his wife, whose regard and friendship I am sincerely eager to secure. You will therefore pardon, will you not, and accept this breach of conventionality as a proof of the feeling which I am anxious to establish between us?"

"I can but feel flattered, madam——"

"Nay, nay; do me the credit to believe that I am a mere egotist, unwilling to forego, even for an hour, the enjoyment of your society; and yet not quite so, as I

coveted it even more for my little Edith than for myself; and I feel quite sure that the selfishness of a mother will readily find its excuse in *your* eyes."

"You do Ida no more than justice, my dear Lady Malcolm, when you believe that you will be welcome to her at all hours," said Sydney; "indeed she was reproaching me for my idleness this morning, fearful lest we should not have terminated our breakfast before your arrival."

"In that case I will not further apologise, and I fully appreciate her kindness; and now, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, you must allow me to congratulate you on the little paradise that you have discovered here—I have rarely seen so lovely a spot."

"Is it not a pretty nest?" asked Elphinstone; "and yet, would you believe it? although we have only resided here for a few weeks, that naughty girl is urging me to exchange it for the dirt and din of London."

"Doubtlessly, Mrs. Elphinstone has some good and sufficient reason for so doing," was the reply.

"You are right, madam, quite right," said Ida, calmly; "we are poor, and consequently not privileged to pass our lives in a dream, however pleasant it might be to do so."

The brow of Sydney flushed, and he looked mortified and ill at ease. There was a momentary silence, which Ida was too proud to break, but which was soon terminated by the good taste and feeling of Lady Malcolm, who, taking the hand of the young hostess, said, in a tone of deep affection—

"I admired you at the moment we first met, Mrs. Elphinstone, as every one must do who looks upon you, but I have now forgotten my admiration in my respect. You possess one of woman's noblest attributes—moral courage, and you are indeed worthy to be the wife of my friend's son. And do you know," she continued, in a lighter strain, "you have relieved my mind of a certain sort of dread. I have a horror of fine ladies who cannot afford to divest themselves of 'the purple and fine linen' of the world—I value the picture; I care little for the gilding of the frame. Thus you see that, after the avowal which you have so frankly and gracefully made, I shall be relieved of

a thousand apprehensions, and be enabled to meet you upon equal terms ; for despite the wonder which I read in the eyes of that dear boy, I can truly plead poverty, as well as yourself, and, after a youth and womanhood of luxury, am compelled to look the stern realities of my destiny steadily in the face."

" My dear Lady Malcolm, you astonish me ! " exclaimed Elphinstone.

" I can believe it," was the calm reply, " and yet such indeed is the case. However, as I before remarked, I do not feel privileged to inflict the detail of my trials and disappointments upon Mrs. Elphinstone."

" You have at least excited alike my surprise and my curiosity," persisted Sydney.

" They shall be gratified," said Lady Malcolm, " when they will not entail weariness on your wife."

" I beg, madam"—commenced Ida—

" Look yonder, beneath that weeping ash," interposed Sydney ; " there is a rustic seat where we may be sheltered from both sun and wind. Shall we adjourn thither, and leave Ida to improve her acquaintance with Miss Malcolm ? "

" With *Miss Malcolm* ? " echoed the mother, with a smile ; " can you really have forgotten, Sydney, that your little play-fellow was christened Edith ? "

" No, indeed, my dear friend, but——"

" Nay, nay, this is folly," persisted Lady Malcolm. " Edith is still a child, and as such I should wish her to be considered. Youth passes only with too much rapidity ; we need not seek to hasten its departure. Am I not right, Mrs. Elphinstone ? "

Ida shrank involuntarily ; but fortunately her visitor, unconscious of the new pang which she had inflicted, turned, without pausing, towards Elphinstone, and said sadly :

" Well, as I shall rejoice to have terminated my self-imposed task, and once more to forget my sorrows in the society of your amiable wife, I will, with her permission, avail myself of your suggestion ; and the rather as Edith will be so great a gainer by my absence."

CHAPTER XXV.

FRESH MISGIVINGS.

SYDNEY rose and offered his arm to his mother's friend ; and when they had quitted the apartment, Ida found herself alone with the fair girl who had already become to her an object of distrust.

Edith, after raising one timid glance to the face of Mrs. Elphinstone, whose eyes were riveted on the retreating figure of her husband, fixed her own upon the floor, as if wholly engrossed by the arabesques of the carpet, and thus Ida, as she awakened to her duties as a hostess, was enabled to gaze for an instant upon the pure and fresh young creature before her.

It was true, as Lady Malcolm had said, that with her eyes thus veiled by their long lashes, Edith did indeed look like a mere girl ; but Mrs. Elphinstone soon became aware that when those glorious eyes were raised, and beamed with intellect and emotion, the girl was suddenly transformed into the woman, and that her beauty was of no common order.

"How shall I preserve you from *ennui*, Miss Malcolm, during the absence of your mother, and——"

She paused, for Edith, who had hitherto remained motionless, suddenly lifted her head with a smile of grateful pleasure, so bright and ingenuous that she felt unable to complete the sentence she had framed, or to utter the name of her husband.

"And," she pursued, "may I hope that I shall succeed?"

"How kind you are, madam ; how very kind," faltered the blushing Edith ; "in your society I should think it impossible to feel *ennui*. It is I, on the contrary——"

"I must echo the words of Lady Malcolm, and forbid all verbal ceremonies," said Ida, forcing a smile. "You are so

admirable an artist, that perhaps my portfolio may afford you some amusement; or," she continued, anxious to assure herself of the extent of her companion's acquirements, and consequently of her own imaginary peril, "you are probably also a musician, in which case I will request of you to favour me by trying my piano, which is, I believe, a tolerably good one."

Edith rose unaffectedly, and approached the instrument.

"If it be really your wish, madam," she said, modestly, "I am ready to obey you; but if you *would* do me the kindness to permit me in the first instance to be a listener, I should indeed feel grateful to you."

Mrs. Elphinstone complied with ready grace, and executed one of the most complicated of Thalberg's compositions with a brilliancy and taste which caused the cheeks of Edith to glow and her eyes to sparkle with delight and animation.

"What a glorious finger!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, as Ida resigned her seat. "Ah, madam, you can never feel alone with such a talent as yours, and such an instrument to give it voice."

"You are an enthusiast, I see," said her companion, "but now I claim your promise to afford me the gratification of becoming a listener in my turn."

"I *do* love music, I confess," was the earnest rejoinder of Miss Malcolm, as, in obedience to the bidding of her hostess, she swept the keys with a mastery and purity of expression wonderful in one so young; and then glided into those exquisite 'Songs without Words' of Mendelssohn, which are the very triumph of instrumental melody.

Ida listened entranced, less by the talent displayed by this young girl than by the passionate feeling which marked her performance. Her very soul appeared to be poured forth as she played: self was forgotten for the moment; and she evidently existed only in the wondrous harmony which she awakened.

As the sounds ceased, there was silence, for Mrs. Elphinstone, herself deeply susceptible to the charm of music, was too much excited to indulge in the common venality of praise, while Edith, restored to self-consciousness, was too timid to move or speak.

"Pardon me," said Ida, at length, struggling against the conflicting feelings by which she had been momentarily overcome, "but I have really been taken by surprise. You must have been a musician, Miss Malcolm, to comprehend all the powers and resources of the science so thoroughly at your age."

"I am wholly indebted to my mother for whatever efficiency I may have acquired," replied Edith, simply; "she has spared no pains to perfect me in her favourite accomplishment; but I can never hope to rival her, although she had the marvellous self-denial to endure my discordant attempts when I was a mere urchin of four years old, and has persevered in her wearisome task ever since."

"It must long have ceased to weary her," said Mrs. Elphinstone; "but it is not so much your execution which surprises me, as the expression with which you render passages that I should have conceived could only have been comprehended in their actual depth and significance by a wrung heart and a bruised spirit."

The eyes of Miss Malcolm fell, and a cloud of sorrow passed across her fair young brow.

"Perhaps you are right, Mrs. Elphinstone," she faltered; "perhaps I never should indeed have understood the true language of music if I never had known suffering."

"You! Miss Malcolm, you!" exclaimed Ida; "at your age—in your sheltered position, constantly under the watchful eye of a mother,—what suffering can you have known?"

"You forget, dear madam," replied the fair girl, as large tears fell upon her cheeks, "that even the fond and untiring eye of a mother cannot always ward off grief, and that I am already fatherless."

"Forgive me—forgive me," said Ida, distressed at the effect of her remark; "but that was not the sorrow, that was not the struggle, to which I alluded."

"I have known no other," said Edith, ingenuously.

Mrs. Elphinstone sighed. She had never known a youth like this. Her struggles and sorrows had commenced even from her girlhood. Luxury and indulgences had been powerless against the influence of passions early awakened and prematurely developed; and it was consequently with a sad

curiosity that she contemplated the calm and holy expression of Edith.

Not a storm had passed over that tranquil spirit whose pages angels might have perused—not a germ of evil could be detected in that calm and placid heart which filial love sufficed to fill and satisfy.

Unlike Ida herself, who had been reared in the hot-bed of fashion and ambition, forced into unhealthy mental growth, and weakened by those fatal influences by which the votaries of the world are predestined to become its victims, Edith Malcolm had been permitted to live out her childhood and her youth amid the joys and sorrows proper to her years: no idle and ill-timed flatteries, no vain prophecies of future triumphs, had polluted her young ears, and profaned her guileless heart; she had never been taught to regard love as a speculation, and marriage as an investment; her leisure had never been amused by the perusal of puerile romances, or her energies exercised in the attempt to become a heroine.

Mrs. Elphinstone had, as we have shown, been isolated from all companions of her own age, educated for display, and taught that the one great duty of her existence was self-aggrandisement.

Childhood is much more morally impressible than the generality of persons are willing to believe. Because a child rebels against the authority of a parent or a preceptor in the mere wantonness of an undisciplined will, it is often supposed that neither example nor precept has produced its intended effect: this, however, is a vital error; the bending of the twig is not more certain to decide the inclination of the tree than are early impressions to influence and pre-determine the after character.

In infancy and youth, the human clay is plastic, and may consequently be moulded at will; but when once it has become indurated by time, it is vain to attempt the removal of the false lines of the image; its beauties and defects will endure through life, modified indeed by circumstances, but still visible and distinct.

Strange and almost incredible did it therefore appear to Ida, that the daughter of Lady Malcolm should have attained

an age at which she had herself already listened more than once to the voice of passion, discarded suitors, and regarded herself as fully competent to decide her own destiny, without one dream of the heart-struggles which must inevitably await her; but there was something so earnest, yet so calm in the tone in which Edith had said, in reply to her own observation, "I have known no other," that she could not refuse to place faith in the assurance.

"So much the worse—so much the worse," murmured the demon within her; "when the stream gushes forth, it will burst its bounds; when her heart-tide swells forth, it will swell and boil into a lava-flood; the passionate outgushing of her spirit to which I have just listened, was never due to the inspiration of a mother's teaching. A touch, a tone, will suffice to awaken her from her dream of calm—and then——"

"And you, dear madam, you, beautiful, gifted, and beloved as you are, surely you cannot have known the sorrows which you deprecate for me," murmured a low sweet voice beside her, and Ida started as she felt the hand of Miss Malcolm laid softly on her arm; "and yet the sad train of thought into which you have fallen would almost lead me to fear——"

"You are right—quite right," said Mrs. Elphinstone, in an accent which she in vain attempted to render firm; "*I have* known many and bitter sorrows, but that is nothing—nothing—the past has been endured and may be forgotten—it is the future which makes the heart swell, and the brain giddy."

Edith drew back alarmed.

"Poor child!" said Ida, who remarked the gesture; "do *you* then never look into the future? never shrink from its probable consequences?"

"Never, madam, I am so happy in the present."

"But that very happiness tends to heighten the terrors of the future. It is soothing to look back upon the sufferings from which we have escaped—but to look back on happiness which we have lost would be too horrible! The burthen of Atlas would be but a feather weight besides such a crushing, such an overwhelming agony."

Edith sank almost breathless into a chair, she could not utter a syllable.

"Forgive me," said Mrs. Elphinstone, suddenly, with one of her most winning smiles; "I have done wrong to give way to such gloomy ideas, above all, when I may say with you, that I am so happy in the present. I suppose that it is the jealousy of that very happiness which makes me fear to lose it. And yet it is very weak, is it not? We must not let my husband suspect that I indulge in such nervous folly.—And now for the portfolio, Miss Malcolm," she continued, with forced gaiety; "you will recognise some of the scenes of my sketches, for Mr. Elphinstone was anxious that, on our departure from the neighbourhood, we should carry away with us some memorials of our sojourn; and, terrible to avow! a wife's first duty is obedience. See! here is the cottage, with Sydney, still more terrible to admit, smoking his cigar under the verandah. And here—here is the park lodge, your present home, with the glorious old beeches in the background; does it not make a pretty picture?"

With all the lightheartedness of her age, Edith had already conquered her agitation, and, as she recognised the subjects of the several sketches, she uttered repeated exclamations of delight.

"Is not Mr. Elphinstone enchanted with these lovely drawings?" she asked, artlessly; and then, without awaiting a reply, she continued: "How very, very happy you must make him; and how thankful mamma will be to know how kind, and amiable, and gifted a wife he has, for she loves him, Mrs. Elphinstone, as if he were her own son; and you cannot conceive how anxious she has been to discover if you were as good as you are beautiful."

As Edith uttered these words, and ere Mrs. Elphinstone had time to reply, Lady Malcolm and Sydney entered from the garden. There was a slight shade of sadness on the fine features of the widow, and even Sydney himself had for the moment lost his joyous smile. The animation of her daughter, however, soon sufficed to restore Lady Malcolm to cheerfulness; while the anxious look of his wife cleared away at once the mists which obscured the spirit of the bridegroom.

"I have a thousand thanks to offer you for your indulgence, Mrs. Elphinstone," said her visitor, "and, if I can judge by the countenance of Edith, she owes me quite as many for the delightful hour which my absence has enabled her to pass with you."

"Indeed I do, dear mamma," exclaimed the young girl, enthusiastically, "for while I have had Mrs. Elphinstone all to myself, the time has flown with such rapidity that you seem scarcely to have been away ten minutes."

"Miss Malcolm has been delighting me, madam, by her exquisite performance on the piano," said Ida, courteously; "she is indeed an accomplished musician."

"I am truly gratified by your opinion," said Lady Malcolm, "and the rather as I understand from Sydney that your own proficiency in music is something marvellous. Indeed," she added, with a smile which was full of warmth and affection, "if I am to believe even the half of what he has told me, I cannot have one wish ungratified for the son of my dearest friend."

Ida blushed deeply.

"Sydney," she replied, "is naturally anxious to justify his choice in your eyes, but you must accept his testimony with considerable reservation."

Elphinstone retorted by passing his hand caressingly over the dark and glossy braids that lay upon her forehead.

"Ha! you have been looking at Ida's drawings," he said, as his eye fell upon the contents of the portfolio which were scattered over the table; "are they not well executed? And this sketch of the cottage is perfect. Did you recognise it, Edith? That is my property, and so jealous am I of my rights, that I ventured to have it framed for my dressing-room."

"It is indeed beautiful, and most faithful," said Miss Malcolm, "and the spot from which it was taken must have been most judiciously chosen."

"Oh, Ida's eye never deceives her," said Sydney, proudly, "but in order that you may do it full justice, will you come as far as the spot where she was seated?"

"Willingly," was the reply of Edith, as she rose with the drawing in her hand, "the pleasure will be twofold, as

I shall by so doing be enabled not only to appreciate at its full value the sketch of Mrs. Elphinstone, but also to have a nearer view of your lovely garden, which is indeed a wilderness of sweets. Will you permit me this indulgence, my dear madam?" she asked, with an appealing look towards her hostess.

The assent of Ida was instantly but somewhat coldly given, and in the next moment Sydney and his beautiful companion disappeared.

"How happy you have made that amiable young man, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the elder lady, as soon as they were alone; "it is impossible to express the delight with which I listened to his animated description of your many excellences. Upon me, who have latterly been familiar only with the shady side of existence, his glowing and beautiful joy produced the effect of sudden sunshine. Indeed our meeting, his marriage, and all by which I am so suddenly surrounded, appears like a bright dream. Grateful am I, nevertheless, to feel that it is real and tangible; I loved his mother so deeply."

"Sydney also adores her memory," said Ida; "by his description she must have been beautiful."

"She was, and I need not tell you that her beauty is reflected in her son; but she was more than beautiful, and those who knew her best forgot the charms of her person in the perfection of her heart and mind. Poor Elinor! she deserved a better fate."

"Was she not happy, then?" asked her companion.

"Far from it, my young friend; hers was the mere fleeting happiness of a few brief months. Dazzled by her beauty, and fascinated by her many admirable qualities, which made her the idol of her circle, Mr. Elphinstone, at that period a man of considerable wealth, as well as eminently handsome, won her affections, and for a time appeared worthy of his good fortune; but unhappily his tastes and habits were ill-calculated for domestic life. He soon wearied of the monotony of home, and sought for excitement in a world which was but too ready to welcome him back into its vortex. But Elinor never complained; she idolised her husband, and she bore her trials with the

fortitude and resignation of an angel. To her he was ever the first and only love of her young heart, and the father of her child."

"And did she long endure such an existence?" inquired Ida, whose cheeks had assumed the hue of Parian marble.

"For years," replied Lady Malcolm, who, in her own emotion, overlooked that of her listener; "aye, even when to neglect was added ruin, she was true to herself, and to the faith which she had plighted to one of the most ungrateful and ungenerous of men."

"And yet—" murmured Ida, in an unsteady voice, "you think that he *did* love her once?"

"Of that fact there can be no doubt," pursued the speaker; "he loved her madly, but there was no principle, no stability in his love. Essentially selfish, he gradually learned to look upon her as an obstacle in his path of pleasure and dissipation, and he thrust her from it as he would have done any other impediment which might have presented itself."

"Strange!" said Ida, moodily, "that Sydney should never have told me one word of this."

"By no means," observed Lady Malcolm, "for even Sydney himself has but a vague idea of the extent of his mother's sufferings. No, Elinor would rather have endured a thousand deaths than have breathed into the ear of her boy one word of blame connected with her erring husband. Almost a stranger in his own house, it was only at rare intervals that Mr. Elphinstone saw his son; and, fortunately, just as the boy had attained an age when the true position of his mother must have necessarily become evident to him, his wretched father died; and thus, the tears which he mingled with those of his surviving parent were free from the bitterness which must otherwise have rendered his grief tenfold more poignant. To this moment, therefore, Sydney is able to name his father without a blush, and to regret him without a misgiving; and this is the pious work of his angel mother, whose heart was soothed to the last by the respect which her son bore to the memory of his dead father."

"And yet he slighted her——"

"And ruined her," added Lady Malcolm.

"Oh, that was nothing, nothing," exclaimed Ida, her eyes flashing with passionate emotion, "when once he had torn down the idol from the shrine at which he had once worshipped, it mattered little that he should send away the jewels in which it had been decked; the trampled fragments of a broken heart could ill have brooked the tinselled mockeries which are suited only to a happy one."

"But you forget that she was a mother."

"I should have forgotten all save my own wrongs," replied Mrs. Elphinstone, in the same excited tone in which she had just spoken, "all—even my child."

"My dear young friend," said Lady Malcolm, with a sad smile, as she pressed the hand of her companion in her own, "you know not the depth and fervour of a mother's love—and see how she has been rewarded for her self-abnegation. See how all her hopes for her idolised boy have been fulfilled. Could she look up from the grave, fondly and proudly as she loved him, she could not wish Sydney other than he is."

At this moment, a peal of clear, ringing, graceful laughter sounded from the garden, and Ida, who had hitherto been so absorbed in the recital of Lady Malcolm that she had ceased to dwell upon the prolonged absence of her husband, suddenly raised her head, and gazed earnestly through the open window.

Sydney was in hot pursuit of a late butterfly and, bare-headed, with his chesnut curls dancing in the wind, and his cheeks flushed with eagerness, was bounding over the flower beds with all the elasticity of an antelope, in his attempt to capture the parti-coloured fugitive.

As her glance rested on him, the lips of his wife parted with a proud and happy smile; but in the next moment, an expression of pain passed over her face, and she hastily averted her eyes.

"Those young hearts are lighter than ours at this moment my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," observed Lady Malcolm, as she wiped away a lingering tear. "I am grieved to see that I have infected you with my own melancholy; we will talk no more upon this unhappy subject. It might indeed have

been more judicious had I not touched on it at all, but my enduring affection for my poor Elinor renders me selfish; it is such a relief to me to be enabled to dwell upon her memory, and to remember that the death of the pure in heart is less an agony than an ovation; that the chime of each succeeding hour is a call of harmony, a summons of peace and love; that life ebbs away like the sunset billows of a summer evening—like the gradual closing of the perfumed chalice of a flower—or the severe and solemn folding together of the spirit-wings, which are so soon to expand into their full and perfect proportions on another and a brighter shore where they will never again be furled.”

“I thank you for the confidence which you have reposed in me, Lady Malcolm,” said Ida, as she threw herself back in her seat, and strewed the carpet around it with the scattered leaves of the blossoms which Sydney had so carefully arranged for her, only a few hours previously. “It is, at times, desirable to dwell upon the experiences of others; the past reads a wholesome lesson to the present; and I confess that I, for one, despise the cowardice which shrinks from the effort of looking steadily forward, even upon a forbidding prospect, or backward, upon the struggle of human endurance.”

“Happily,” said her companion, “trials like those of my dear lost friend are rare indeed. Hers was a life which always appeared to me to convey a great and touching moral, but it was not the less, on that account, an existence of wretchedness.”

“Wretchedness indeed!” echoed Ida, as she swept her hands across her brow, “to be decked by the fingers of love, only for the sacrifice;” and, as the hand was withdrawn, the camellia which had hitherto been nestled amid the folds of her hair was crushed within it.

“I have been wrong, very wrong,” said Lady Malcolm; “I have quite unstrung your nerves. Only look, you have actually destroyed the magnificent bouquet which I admired so much on my arrival.”

“Oh, pray do not grieve over it,” said Ida, with a bitter

smile: "it *was* beautiful, yes, very beautiful; I am obliged to admit that fact, but it has pleased and amused me for a time, and consequently has done all that I had a right to demand from it,—and it is beautiful even in its ruins, is it not? though it can never again be restored to its first glorious splendour. That, however, matters little, as its charm must sooner or later have decayed with its freshness; so that you see, my dear madam, its destruction was a mere question of time."

"Oh, Ida, such a butterfly we have captured!" exclaimed Sydney, as he sprang into the room; "only look at the brilliancy of its colouring."

But Ida's eyes were not upon the insect, they were riveted upon a bouquet in the hand of Miss Malcolm, the counterpart of that which lay scattered at her feet.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOUQUET.

How little can men appreciate the trifles out of which a woman's love is ingenious in creating anguries of good or evil. It was a mere common-place courtesy on the part of Mr. Elphinstone to offer Miss Malcolm some of the flowers of which she expressed her admiration; and it is probable that had he done so with less attention to their arrangement, even Ida herself might have been careless of the fact; but, unfortunately, Sydney had not yet forgotten the delight evinced by his wife at the graceful grouping of the bouquet which he had combined for her that morning; and, accordingly, as he prepared a second for Edith, he said, gaily:—

"You have an artist's eye as well as Mrs. Elphinstone, and I dare not, therefore, do otherwise than exert my best skill in order to render my offering acceptable."

"A thousand thanks," was the artless reply, "nothing could be more perfect than that which you arranged for

Mrs. Elphinstone, so do not attempt any variation, but let me have it, flower by flower, and even leaf by leaf, a facsimile of hers."

"Now for an effort of memory," laughed the lighthearted young man; "your imperious mandate shall be obeyed, and we shall then compare the two, in order to judge of my success."

The flowers were, therefore, gathered and grouped with the same fastidious care as he had evinced on the previous occasion, when they were a heart-offering to his idolised wife; and they had scarcely been transferred to Edith, and received their due meed of admiring approval, than the quick eye of Sydney detected the butterfly which subsequently became the object of his pursuit.

Little indeed did he imagine the pang that he had inflicted on her whom he would gladly have shielded from every shade of suffering. To him Ida was the type alike of physical and moral perfection; and he could as soon have doubted the beauty of her person as the strength and purity of her mind. Wholly engrossed by her image, he was utterly indifferent to the attractions of all the rest of the sex, beyond the natural gratification of looking on a lovely face, as he would have looked on a fine landscape, or a gorgeous sunset; and that she should entertain one doubt of his affection, one mistrust of his devotion, was an idea which had never for an instant crossed his mind.

Unlike Ida herself, their disparity of age was a fact to which his thoughts never reverted; unlike her, he never looked into the future; with the natural buoyancy and confidence of a young fresh spirit, he lived in the engrossing happiness of the present; and if, by chance, he glanced forward beyond the passing hour, it was with a sanguine conviction that his after-life must be as bright as it had hitherto proved.

There was always a golden thread woven into every web of the heart-loom of Sydney Elphinstone, for his was not a nature to dwell upon the dark side of existence; with all his good and endearing qualities, he possessed much of his father's reckless temperament; and as yet, no sorrow had come to chill, no cloud to overcast it. Even the immediate

question of his coming struggle with the world in which he must so soon force his way by his own energy and talent, he put from him, as we have shown, as a vague future far and dim in the distance, instead of a stern reality with which he would ere long be called upon to grapple.

He was resolved to accomplish great things: he admitted to himself that he must do so for Ida's sake, and he believed that he was ready for the combat, while in fact he had neglected to gird on his weapon. Any relenting on the part of Mr. Trevanion, he neither anticipated nor desired; he felt proud to think that he should need no extraneous aid in surrounding the idol of his love with the luxuries to which she had been accustomed from her girlhood; but meanwhile, he satisfied himself with resolutions, and remained inactive.

How many Sydney Elphinstones there are in the world!

After one long searching look, first at the unlucky flowers, and next at the fair owner, Ida turned towards Lady Malcolm, and said, with a sarcastic smile:

"Your daughter is, I presume, an entomologist, my dear madam, and consequently will be gratified by this addition to her cabinet."

"I—oh, no," exclaimed Edith, shuddering, "I could never endure to impale insects on pins, and poison them with camphor. What would this poor butterfly be, sacrificed to science—for I believe that is the admitted, or rather I should say, presumed apology for destroying so much that is bright and beautiful,—what would it be beside what it was, as it nestled in the heart of the flower, or floated on the sunshiny air, instinct with life and enjoyment?"

"No, no; give me birds upon the wing, bees among the blossoms, fish sporting in the clear waters—anything and everything that is fulfilling the purposes and profiting by the privileges for which it was created; but I should as soon dream of living among mummies, when I could secure the society of my sentient fellow-creatures, as I should of contenting myself with the classified skeletons of moths and beetles, when I could see them in all their beauty and variety, un mutilated and unharmed."

"Why, Edith," said Lady Malcolm, with a fond glance at

her daughter, whose cheeks were flushed with animation, "you have suddenly become quite eloquent."

"And I have not done yet, mamma," was the reply, "for when Mr. Elphinstone's butterfly has been properly applauded, and that he has once more restored it to liberty, as I trust he will do, I am going to claim Mrs. Elphinstone's admiration for my beautiful bouquet. Is it not gorgeous, my dear madam?"

"Extremely so."

"But do you not remark anything peculiar in its arrangement?"

"I think it very gracefully arranged."

"Does it resemble any other you have ever seen?"

"There is a family likeness in all bouquets, Miss Malcolm."

"Oh, but, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, this was intended by Mr. Elphinstone to be precisely like your own: and do you not think that he has succeeded perfectly?"

"It is more essential that you should think so, Miss Malcolm."

"Well, then, in that case, the success is complete, for I do not believe that we could, were they once out of our sight, recognise our own property."

"I scarcely agree with you," said Ida, with an ambiguous smile, as she pointed to the flowery ruin at her feet; "yours has as yet all the charm of novelty, and is consequently faultless; mine, on the contrary, had ceased to please my eye, so I amused myself, as you perceive, by destroying what little value it had left."

Edith made no reply; there was something in the tone of Mrs. Elphinstone's voice which reminded her of a portion of their interview of the morning, and it was consequently a relief to her when she was summoned to the verandah by Sydney to see him give liberty to his painted captive. She was still watching the languid flight of the benumbed insect when Lady Malcolm rose to take her leave.

"Farewell, Mrs. Elphinstone," she said, affectionately, as she extended her hand, "I see, with great compunction, that I have thoroughly saddened you; but only promise soon to visit the lodge and I will strive to be a more cheer

ful companion. You are too susceptible, my dear young friend, and must struggle against a depth of feeling which cannot fail, should you encourage it, to cast many a shadow over your path. Dwell rather on the happiness of the present than on the sorrows of the past. You are now commencing life in earnest, and must not exhaust your sensibilities on ideal or irremediable evils. Doubtlessly we have all suffered more or less, but let us now at least be happy.

"Look upon me as a mother, and on Edith as a sister, if you will indeed permit me to make such a request; I already feel that I shall love you, and I am anxious, in my turn, to gain your affection."

"I thank you, Lady Malcolm, for your good opinion, and I am grateful for your kindness," said Ida, with constraint, "nor shall it be my fault if I do not profit by your advice; unfortunately, however, we cannot always control our feelings, nor can we compel happiness at will."

"You are right, no doubt, but we can at least accept it when it is placed within our reach; so clear that fair brow, and forget the sorrows of others in your own brighter fortune."

Ida forced a smile as she echoed the parting compliments of her guest, and together they passed into the garden, where Sydney and his young companion were still engaged in watching the crippled insect, which had evidently suffered from its temporary imprisonment.

"I will escort you to the entrance of the lane, my dear Lady Malcolm, while Ida puts on her bonnet for our morning ramble," said Sydney, as he offered an arm to each of the departing guests, "I give you five minutes, love," he added, as he turned and nodded gaily to his wife; and then the party was lost to sight behind the leafy screen of the flower shrubs.

Ida stood for an instant motionless, and then she turned back into the house and cast herself into a seat; she was exhausted by her efforts at self-control. She felt dispirited and almost reckless.

"He could not even suffer her to depart without him—" she murmured; "fool that I was to exult over those worthless flowers because *he* gathered them!—Did he not do the

same for her ! I might have foreseen this—I might have known that it must have come to this ! But so soon—so very soon—shall I be able to endure the existence which I foresee must henceforth be mine ?—But may I not deceive myself ? He is so frank, so guileless—surely love cannot die out like an exhausted taper, while it is yet so young—and she, too, she is still a mere child—no, no, the time is not, cannot yet be come—Sydney is the slave of beauty, and my beauty is unfaded. I have sacrificed all for him—him, and the sacrifice is as yet unrequited—Lady Malcolm is right, I must strive to be happy while I may ; and when the struggle proves fruitless, then indeed—aye, then ! but the future shall be left to work out its own purposes. I am no puling girl to tremble at the task which is allotted to me—it shall be done, done even to the death.”

For a moment Mrs. Elphinstone remained motionless, her head buried in her hand, and her eyes closed ; but suddenly she rose, walked steadily to the mirror, examined herself earnestly, smoothed the disordered bands of her hair, took a book from the table, and then returned calmly to her chair. It is probable that she neither knew the nature of the volume of which she thus quietly possessed herself, nor the page at which she had opened it, although for a time she appeared absorbed in its contents ; for, after the lapse of a few moments, she relinquished her occupation, and carefully collecting the scattered leaves and blossoms with which the floor was strewn, walked with them into the verandah, and flung them handful by handful to the wind, until they had totally disappeared, after which she resumed her book and her seat, and awaited with a calm brow and a steady pulse the return of her husband.

The five minutes had grown into ten ; she glanced once towards the French timepiece on the console : Sydney had been gone more than half an hour ; and still the proud brow remained unruffled, and the clear eye unclouded. Suddenly his quick step was heard upon the gravel-walk, his elastic bound from the yielding turf, and her husband stood before her.

“ What, not ready yet, my love ? ” he exclaimed, in surprise.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Sydney," said Ida, with one of her sweetest smiles, "this terrible book has so engrossed me; and—" she added, glancing at the clock, but still retaining the sunniness of her expression; "you have returned so soon."

"Soon!" echoed Elphinstone, looking in the same direction. "Why, I have a thousand apologies to make to you; I had no idea that I had been away so long."

"Oh, not a word of excuse, dear Sydney, not a word, I entreat of you," was the ready rejoinder; "in the society of those we love time passes like a dream."

"Few are so well aware of that fact as myself," said Elphinstone, "and, above all, when we are *talking* of those we love; and we have not spared you, Ida, on our way to the lodge?"

"Ha! you walked to the lodge?"

"I did indeed, though I had no such intention when I left home; but it was so delightful to me to hear Lady Malcolm and Edith describe the impression which you had made upon them, that I quite forgot how the minutes flew."

"I am much indebted to them."

"Not a whit. They are sensible women, and estimate you at your proper value. So, what with the memories of the past, and the impressions of the present, I thoroughly enjoyed my walk."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"Do you know," exclaimed Sydney, throwing himself down upon the ottoman on which the foot of his wife rested, "I esteem myself the happiest man on the whole earth. I can scarcely understand, even to this moment, how I ever won the love of such a woman as yourself; and now there comes to me an accession of happiness in the society of my mother's dearest friend, and her gentle unsophisticated daughter."

"Poor Sydney!" said his wife, as she passed her slender fingers caressingly over his clustering curls.

"*Poor* Sydney! The adjective is misplaced," was the fond retort, as he drew the small hand to his lips, "I am rich, rich beyond my wildest dreams. Are *you* not my own? Do *you* not love me?"

"Tenderly."

"I know it—I have had proof of it,—and I can feel that you can sympathise in my new-found gratification. My poor mother always coveted for me the regard of Lady Malcolm, for whom she herself felt the affection of a sister."

"I am delighted that you should have secured it."

"And you, Ida, you also; she admires you beyond measure."

"I am honoured by her good opinion."

"And that sweet artless girl;—is she not charming?"

"Very charming,—and very beautiful."

"Yes," said Sydney, somewhat less impetuously than he had yet spoken, "she certainly is beautiful in a certain style."

"Oh, my love," exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, deprecatingly, "let us have no reservations, no criticisms, as regards Miss Malcolm's beauty. There can be but one opinion; Greuze could not have desired a more perfect subject for one of his exquisite pictures."

"Well—perhaps—but, after all, that fair beauty is somewhat *fade*; it is but the mere twilight of actual loveliness."

"We sometimes weary of glare," said Mrs. Elphinstone, still in the same low endearing tone.

"Of glare, yes—but that implies something meretricious and heartless; I was not desecrating beauty by such associations."

"And then, Miss Malcolm is so accomplished—so fascinating."

"So she is; she is full of natural talent, and has thoroughly profited by her opportunities. You say that she is an admirable musician, and she is certainly a wonderful artist for her age."

"And we have only seen her twice!—she may yet astonish us by her proficiency in other accomplishments."

"I hope not, for I confess that I should have no sympathy with a female Crichton; and would rather look upon her as a good, amiable little girl, remarkable only for her extraordinary talents for drawing and music."

"So be it, my dear Sydney; and therefore, until our acquaintance becomes more intimate, Miss Edith Malcolm shall be to us only one of the most beautiful and the most talented girls we have ever met, or are likely to meet."

"An arrangement with which she has every reason to be well satisfied, I think," said Elphinstone, gaily, "but one which is nevertheless no more than is her due. And now, what of our walk, Ida?"

"It is too late, dear."

"Too late? Why I have but exceeded my time by twenty minutes."

"But those twenty minutes have rendered it impossible for me to accompany you. I have letters to write, and the post leaves early."

"Can you not postpone them until to-morrow?"

"I regret to say that they must be dispatched to-day."

"How confoundedly provoking!" exclaimed Sydney, rising to his feet, "and what am I to do with myself while you are engaged in writing?"

"Can you not walk to the lodge, and assist Miss Malcolm with the foreground of her sketch, as you proposed to do?"

"By Jove! not a bad idea; but then, we cannot dispense with you, Ida, for you were to be the prominent figure."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Elphinstone, forcing a laugh, "you have an excellent memory, and do not need my presence. You will not find it more difficult to sketch a figure with which you are familiar than to combine a bouquet after a given model."

"But I cannot bear to be parted from you so long."

"A mere sentimental sophism, my dear Sydney; half an hour soon passes away when we are in the society of those we love."

"Then why strive to make my morning wearisome to me?"

"Sydney!"

"Nay, Ida dear, do not look displeased; but after having hurried back as I did in the hope of a long ramble with you before dinner, I confess that I am terribly disappointed."

"And did you then hurry back so much, my poor Sydney?" said his wife, with another glance at the time-piece, "I had no idea of it."

"It is nevertheless the fact," replied her husband, somewhat impatiently, "for, as we went, Lady Malcolm lingered talking over old times, and I was anxious not to make you wait."

"Nor did you, as you must have seen, my love. A book is always so pleasant a companion when one is alone; and then, when I discontinued reading for a moment, it was so delighted to feel that you were happily engaged with friends who could thoroughly appreciate you, that, believe me, you have nothing to regret. I am not a child, Sydney, I know that I cannot expect to engross either your time or your affections; and therefore I cannot begin too early to accustom myself to a privation to which I must submit sooner or later."

"My dear Ida, you freeze me."

"I have neither the wish nor the intention to do so. Am I not arguing rationally?"

"The heart does not reason, and consequently I have no reply to make."

"Well, then, we will be unreasonable, and you shall be rewarded for your kind intentions. In five minutes I will return equipped for our walk, and the unlucky letters shall be postponed till to-morrow."

"There's a good girl; I have *such* a view to show you."

"But you must also promise me a dry path," said Ida, as she coquettishly extended towards him her small and symmetrical foot, delicately confined in a boot of black silk.

"I will promise you anything, and everything."

And the bride and bridegroom started for their stroll.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW HOME.

A FORTNIGHT after the occurrences detailed in our last chapter, Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone were installed in a small but sheltered and detached cottage near Brompton, face to face with the realities of their worldly position.

The velvet and satin draperies to which Ida had been accustomed from her infancy, were exchanged for modest chintz, showy luxuries for unobtrusive comforts, and a train of powdered and liveried domestics for three female servants. Even with one of these, her own personal attendant, she had been anxious to dispense, but the proposal had proved so unpalatable to her husband, that she had forborne to urge the point; although, ignorant as she was of the actual value of money, she could not help suspecting that the three hundred a year, which while under her father's roof had barely sufficed for the expenses of her toilet, must be very inadequate for the support of five individuals, two of whom were unaccustomed to practise economy in any shape.

Sydney, however, assured her so confidently that, when he had once established himself in chambers, he should not be long before he obtained a brief, that she willingly lent herself to the illusion; and declared that she had nothing to regret save the prospect of his absence.

"And even at that I will not repine," she said; "I should indeed be selfish, did I permit myself to do so, while you are toiling to secure my comfort. Have I not my music, my painting, and my books to occupy me; and, more than all, shall I not be occupied for hours in listening for your tread and anticipating your return. How wise it was of your excellent mother, my dear Sydney, to educate you for a profession, and thus render you independent of the world; and how little did I suspect, who regarded you as a mere

idle young man of fashion, that you were indeed 'one learned in law.'

"Ida," exclaimed her delighted husband, "you are an admirable creature to content yourself with such a home as this. Could you only guess the misgiving with which I brought you here! I will not say that I apprehended reproaches, or even remonstrances; I never for a moment did you so much injustice; but had you looked sad or disappointed, it would have made me wretched."

"Sad! Disappointed!" echoed Mrs. Elphinstone, as she looked round the simple apartment with a glance of exultation; "I declare to you, Sydney, that for weeks past I have not felt so happy or so light of heart."

And she told the truth, for she was *alone* with her husband; Lady Malcolm and her daughter being still resident at the Lodge. Mr. Elphinstone expected shortly to be called to the Bar; his connections were powerful, his person attractive, and his address eminently prepossessing; he was, therefore, in every respect calculated to shine in the profession to which he was about to devote himself; and not one dread of failure oppressed his spirit. He had been welcomed back with enthusiasm at his club, and warmly congratulated on his good fortune in securing the hand of the beautiful Miss Trevanion.

"Never mind, Syd., though the old fellow should sulk for a time," had one of his intimate friends said confidentially; "he must come round at last, for he has no other child, and he hates his family with a good honest hatred that will prove substantial enough to last his life; so you need have no fears for the future. I only wish that I had as fair a chance of coming in for a princely fortune."

"Let him keep his money," was the proud reply; "I ask nothing of him. My career is plain before me, and I am ready to hew out my own path to affluence. What has been done may be done again."

"Ha! what, you have come back to us once more, truant," was his greeting from a fashionable courtesan, in whose morning-room he lounged away a spare half-hour before his return to Brompton, as she placed two of her jewelled fingers in his hand; "but do you know that you

have been a very naughty boy? And now I see you distinctly, do you know that you have a very married look! How is Mrs. Elphinstone? By-the-bye, I shall want you at my concert on Tuesday next. No disclaimers! You can surely be spared for an hour or two by this time. We must have no monopolies; and besides, at your age it would really be too absurd were you to degenerate into a mere married man. You must keep up your connections; you must indeed, for remember that if you neglect the world, the world will soon return the compliment."

"My world is home," said Sydney, courageously.

"Ha, yes; no doubt; very proper; you have not long been a husband, but that kind of thing can't last. Is Mrs. Elphinstone as handsome as ever?"

"Even more so—in my eyes."

"That is very nice. I am glad of it—sincerely glad of it. I hope that she will wear well, although your dark beauties seldom do; but in her case I hope it will be otherwise; it would be unpleasant for you, and mortifying for her, should she fall off while you are in the very prime of life."

"I see no prospect of such a catastrophe," said Sydney, with an uneasy smile.

"Nevertheless, it is certain," persisted the lady, as she swept back a ringlet of a very doubtful shade of auburn; "that fair women retain their youth and freshness much longer than brunettes."

Elphinstone bit his lips to control his indignation.

"Poor Lord Downmere!" resumed the countess, suddenly breaking into a laugh, "what a ridiculous figure you caused him to make at that memorable fête at Richmond, where you enacted the rôle of Lochinvar, and ran off with his bride. I shall never forget it. It was decidedly the best thing of the season; not to mention that the poor man was a martyr to the gout for the whole period of your honeymoon. He will never forgive you, Mr. Elphinstone, never, never. Do you know I am quite delighted that you happened to call when I was alone, for you were always a favourite of mine, and I quite enjoy our little confidential conversation. Of course, Mr. Trevanion has forgiven you, and all has ended like a French vaudeville. By-the-bye,

will you come to my box to-morrow night, and see Dejazet? She is inimitable this season; a perfect evergreen."

At this moment the groom of the chambers announced some other guests, and Elphinstone bowed himself out. As he slowly made his way through the square, however, his face had lost its usual sunny expression; he had winced more than once under the sting of the countess's ill-judged remarks, and the smart still remained.

That his idolised Ida should be made the theme of affected condolence—she whose grace and beauty had thrown a host of titled triflers into the shade—was a mortification which he could ill brook. The world had always treated him so gently, that he was unprepared for comments like those to which he had been compelled to listen. What right had others to speculate upon contingencies on which he himself had never bestowed a thought?

Poor Sydney! He had yet to learn, that no individual who ventures to disregard the conventionalities of society, ever escapes its censure or its ridicule, and that it is far easier to resent than to despise them.

"Why, Elphinstone, can that be you?" exclaimed a familiar voice, as he turned into Grosvenor Place, and an exquisitely gloved hand was passed through his arm; "tired of 'love's delight' and 'the turtle-nest' in the country, hey? I'm rejoiced to know it. We've missed you sadly, you adventurous Benedict. What an *escapade*! On my honour it was too bad; stealing a march upon your friends in that way, and leaving pretty Mary Maitland to wear the willow."

"Nonsense, Lord Charles, Lady Mary was no more to me than a very agreeable acquaintance."

"Be that as it may, my dear fellow, I tell you that she has worn the willow, and worn it very gracefully too. That idiot Banfield, of the Blues, having, I suppose, heard that it is easy to catch a heart on the rebound, was imbecile enough to offer himself before you had evaporated a fortnight, and was dismissed for his pains. Suspicious, hey?"

"Of what?" asked Sydney, pettishly.

"Of what? why of your influence over the affections of

your 'very agreeable acquaintance.' Young ladies of seventeen do not usually dismiss the heir-presumptive to a peerage quite so cavalierly, unless they have either a hope or a regret to indulge."

"You are really not justified in making so free an use of a lady's name," said Elphinstone, with indignation; "I must beg——"

"Pho, pho!" laughed his companion; "I may surely canvass the caprices of my own cousin, without your looking pistols and broadswords at me. Why, my dear fellow, you could do no more if I had been whispering pretty things to your wife. There! there! keep your temper—first you want to quarrel with me because I talk of a possibility, and now you are chafing like a caged panther because I hint at an impossibility."

"Understand, Lord Charles——"

"Yes, yes; I know. No one admired Miss Trevanion more than I did, and no one is more disposed to admire Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone—'soberly,' as Lady Betty says; but you are well aware that I am the most harmless fellow in the world; besides, I quite comprehend that your position is a peculiar one, a very peculiar one; a fact which I shall be careful never to lose sight of. Still the disparity is not so very great, and will appear even less for the next eight or ten years, after which you may, without exercising any very great amount of philosophy, say with the French king, '*Après moi, le deluge*.'"

"Lord Charles Glenhurst, I wish you good morning," said Sydney, suddenly stopping, and resolutely shaking off the arm of his companion.

"There again!" exclaimed his obtuse lordship; "what a tetchy fellow you are! But I am determined not to quarrel with you. Come, I am on my way to the club."

"And I have business in the opposite direction," was the curt rejoinder.

"Well, good morning then, since you will have it so. We shall soon meet again; and meanwhile, do me the favour to offer my best respects to Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Poor Syd.!" was the mental apostrophe of the young

nobleman, as he pursued his walk; "judging from the change in his temper, I suspect that he has caught a Tartar. He would have done better to marry little Mary."

"Drivelling idiot!" was the muttered comment of Elphinstone; "*he* to talk of whispering pretty nothings to Ida!—He who is not worthy to pronounce her name!—And that is a man who calls himself my friend—my friend!—what a bitter mockery of the term. And then I, fool that I was! suffered him to see that he had ruffled me. A pleasant morning I have passed, truly."

Sydney was enlarging his experience of mankind. Often, in the intoxication of his happiness and triumph, had he felt himself to be the object of universal envy; he had yet to learn that for one subtle perfume which is burnt upon the altar of the world by its votaries for a fellow-man, a thousand fetid odours are cast into the flame to poison the surrounding atmosphere.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDS.

THE Elphinstones had not taken possession of their suburban retreat above a month, before it became quite the fashion with a "certain set," to make a pilgrimage to the cottage which was now their home.

A few were prompted by goodwill, or at least by kindness of heart; but the principal number were led there by idleness and curiosity, which they excused to themselves during their drive by sundry pithy apophthegms, such as 'Well, wilful woman must have her way,' 'As the tree falls, it lies,' &c. relieved by expressions of wonder as to how the pampered heiress would contrive to exist with her penniless husband; on the ridiculous nature of her position, tied for life to a mere boy; and on rather lax speculations as to the probable result of so unnatural a match.

"But, my dear marchioness," said a rouged and ringleted

dowager to her equally faded companion, as they rolled in a well-padded chariot towards Brompton ; “ if she should really repent and leave him, it is easy to judge that she will not inflict upon herself the tedium of the Arches Court ; and she is handsome enough to avoid that infliction whenever she pleases ; would it not be disagreeable to be involved in an affair of the kind ? ”

“ Why should it ? ” asked her companion, without unclosing her eyes, as she lay back behind the rose-coloured blind of the carriage window ; “ we are not the keepers of her conscience ; and, meanwhile, until the catastrophe takes place, we must not forget that she will be quite an acquisition. The men will be all curiosity—I need say nothing of the women ; and what with her beauty and her musical talents, she will amply reward the risk ; besides, poor thing ! she will feel grateful, no doubt, that she is not overlooked in her poverty.”

“ You are right, quite right,” was the equally careless rejoinder, “ and Sydney Elphinstone, although he has made such a fool of himself, may also prove a very accommodating resource ; and will be glad enough, I dare say, to accept an ivory for the opera, or a stray concert ticket, which he can no longer afford to purchase, when his escort may be desirable ; so that, after all, we are perhaps acting judiciously in lending our countenance to this very absurd couple.”

“ For my part,” said the Marchioness of Crichton, “ I confess that I shall be curious to see the haughty beauty who dismissed my cousin, Sir Mark Merivale, with a smile and a curtsy, doing the honours of a cottage in the purlieus of London ; it must be quite a comedy.”

“ *Comédie larmoyante*, I should think,” sneered Lady Martha Swaincote, as the equipage drew up at the door of a leaf-embowered and verandahed dwelling, overgrown by honeysuckle and creeping roses. “ Bless me ! why surely we have made a mistake, and have intruded on the back-scene of an opera ballet.”

But no ; their tagged and powdered footman was duly informed by the neat waiting woman who answered the gate-bell that this was indeed the residence of Mrs. Elphinstone ; and moreover, that her mistress was at home.

After a rapid glance over the exterior of the cottage, and a hope, expressed considerably above a whisper, that they should not suffer from damp feet, as they measured with their eyes the length of the gravel-walk over which they were compelled to advance in order to reach the house, the two great ladies at length made up their minds to alight; and, preceded by the female servant, and followed by their own parti-coloured attendant, they overcame the difficulty, and found themselves in the small entrance-hall, whence a door, carefully sheltered by a *battant* of crimson baize, gave ingress to the drawing-room.

As they were announced, Mrs. Elphinstone rose quietly from the *dormeuse* in which she had been reclining, engaged upon a new work which Sydney had brought from town on the previous day, and advanced a step or two to meet them.

Nothing could be more simple, and at the same time more elegant, than her morning costume; for, free for a time from all doubt and all mistrust, Ida took a secret pride in adorning herself, and thus eliciting the admiration of her husband.

Nor had she neglected to extend the fascination of good taste and refinement to all about her. Even Sydney himself could scarcely recognise his home after she had become its inmate.

A few pounds, judiciously expended, had done wonders. Snowy draperies tempering the bright colours of the chintz hangings; graceful toys scattered over the tables, *jardinières* filled with exotics, whose perfume filled the apartment, gave a summer aspect to the small but pretty room, which rendered the absence of more costly ornaments overlooked, or at least disregarded.

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the marchioness, as she extended her hand, and then languidly threw herself upon a sofa; "you have not forgotten me, I trust: and see, I have brought Lady Martha Swaincote, who was as anxious as myself to renew her acquaintance with you; what an age it is since we have met! Never, you know, since the eventful evening when you concluded one of the most charming fêtes of the season by a *coup de théâtre*—But

we will not revert to a subject which may be painful to you."

"By no means," said Ida, with a calm smile; "why should it be so, when I am one of the happiest women upon the earth?"

"In that case I have committed no indiscretion," replied her noble friend, "and am delighted to be able to congratulate you; for really marriage is such a lottery at the best, that when persons really run a risk as you did, it is quite comforting to know that they have no reason to repent."

"I am not aware that I ran any risk, madam," retorted Ida, haughtily; "I knew Mr. Elphinstone to be a man of honour."

"Of course, my dear, of course," interposed Lady Martha, with affected gravity; "our friend was not intending to infer any doubt of your husband's honour, but of his stability. He was so very young, that she dreaded lest he should have mistaken a mere transitory fancy for a solid attachment."

"Just so," acquiesced the marchioness, raising her glass to her eye, and glancing leisurely about her; "Lady Martha has expressed my true meaning; and I really was apprehensive that things might not turn out well; for, setting aside the extreme youth of Mr. Elphinstone, you must be aware that you could both of you have done much better. That, however, is of course your own affair."

"I am rejoiced that your ladyship concedes so much," said her hostess, with the air of an empress.

"I am, I assure you, quite delighted," pursued the lady; "and really you have a very pretty little house; is it not, Lady Martha? I am actually glad to have seen it; for the marquis has a widowed aunt who was silly enough to make an imprudent marriage, and who, being now compelled to live upon a very limited jointure, is looking out for a residence suited to her means. I will mention this cottage to her, as she may perhaps find a similar one in the neighbourhood, and she would be a charming companion for Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Are we not to have the pleasure of seeing your hus-

band?" inquired Lady Martha, who, less self-engrossed than her friend, had remarked the indignation of their hostess.

"Mr. Elphinstone is in town," replied Ida; "he has just been called to the Bar, and is consequently compelled to pass the greater portion of the day at his chambers."

"Called to the Bar!" exclaimed the marchioness; "are you really serious? Why, what a dreary life you must lead! It must be quite a relief to you to receive your friends; and you must also be in a constant state of anxiety; London is such a horrid place for young men, and those odious clubs render them so terribly independent of their homes."

"Mr. Elphinstone has not, I am happy to say, evinced any disposition to avail himself of his independence," was the quiet reply.

"He would be very ungrateful had he done so," remarked Lady Martha, in a conciliating tone; "with such a home, and such a wife, he need scarcely seek for enjoyment elsewhere."

"Still," said the marchioness, sententiously, "I cannot understand his volunteering the drudgery of a profession. We all know that he was poor; but you, Mrs. Elphinstone, are an only child, and your father is very wealthy."

"Quite true, madam."

"So you see, my dear—you will excuse the liberty which I am taking, and remember that I am older than you, and have had more experience of the world—I consider that you have been ill-advised to indulge him in so silly a caprice,—for of course he must look to you for advice; at *his* age and with *his* habits, he can know nothing of business; and had you induced him to abandon this extraordinary idea, you might have had him constantly under your own eye, which would have been very desirable.

"I tell you this advisedly, and I have some right to do so, for although the marquis was ten years my senior when I became his wife, I can assure you that I had many a heartache. It is quite ridiculous to suppose that because a man is married he undergoes a moral apotheosis: no, no; the French proverb is a true one; 'the cowl does not make

the monk ;' and, until we can reform human nature, men will be men."

With this sublime climax her ladyship slowly rose, selected a magnificent magnolia from the bouquet on the centre table, which she transferred to her girdle, shook out the folds of her violet-coloured satin, and prepared to depart.

"I shall see you soon and often, I hope, Mrs. Elphinstone," she said, "I retain a delightful memory of your musical talents. In short, you must always be an acquisition ; and, as you know, the marquis is one of your most devoted admirers."

"Your ladyship's kindness is very flattering," said Ida, with dignity ; "but I regret I cannot avail myself of it, as we have no carriage. I am, however, much gratified that you have honoured me with a visit, since you were so good as to feel an interest in my happiness, as you must have convinced yourself that I am perfectly satisfied with my destiny, that I have no ambition beyond that which my marriage has fulfilled, and that I can, without any misgiving, trust Mr. Elphinstone even at his club."

"Ha, my dear," sighed her ladyship, as she swept out of the room, "no doubt you feel all you say : we women are such confiding creatures, and you are still certainly very beautiful."

Lady Martha followed her friend ; and as the door closed behind them, Ida buried her face in the sofa pillows, and fell into a painful train of thought. The iron hand had, indeed, been gloved in velvet, but the grasp was not the less deadly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOME.

ELPHINSTONE had, as stated by his wife, been called to the Bar ; his chambers were, if not sumptuous'y, at least comfortably and sufficiently furnished ; he had provided himself with a confidential clerk ; laid in a magnificent stock of stationery ; fitted up his bookcase with the most valuable works of reference to be obtained for money ; secured a gown and wig of unexceptionable cut and quality, in which, as Ida laughingly declared, he looked like a quasi lord chancellor ; made up his mind to study for at least six hours in the day ; and, in short, required nothing beyond the opportunity of putting his legal talents to the test.

Nothing, therefore, remained to be done ; save, indeed, that he considered it necessary to curtail the hours of study, in order to secure clients ; but he had so many friends, that he entertained little doubt of his success in that respect. Day by day, too, he had reason to believe that all apprehension on the subject would be superfluous ; but somehow or other it constantly happened, that the very individuals who assured him of their support as a matter of course, should they be accidentally involved in litigation, were sure to be intimate with Sir Frederick Thesiger, or Sir Fitzroy Kelly, and, consequently, felt themselves compelled to place the business in the hands of an old professional friend, while they could not, equally as a matter of course, take the liberty of suggesting to men of such eminence the choice of junior counsel.

For a time Elphinstone listened and believed ; and even amid his disappointment and mortification, endeavoured by hard study to render himself worthy of the confidence which would, as he fondly hoped, ere long be placed in him.

But as month after month went by, and winter succeeded

to autumn ; as, after a Christmas of isolation from all his former friends, he saw himself passing the threshold of a new year, and still found himself without a brief, the excitement of hope wore off ; and, abandoning his chambers to the care of his clerk, who contrived by the aid of the morning paper and a new novel to get through the tedious hours of his monotonous existence, he sauntered down to his club, and even as time wore on, accidentally joined a water party to Hampton Court or Richmond.

A feeling of false shame prevented him, however, from communicating to his wife these lapses from professional duty ; he could not bear to damp her sanguine anticipations ; and since the tide of fashionable visitors had ebbed, she lived so retired a life, that she was never likely to hear of his movements from any other lips than his own.

The spring was a glorious one ; the London season had just commenced ; and one engagement grew out of another so naturally, that Sydney soon ceased to reflect upon the whirl of dissipation in which he had involved himself. Careful never to overstay the hour at which he was aware that his wife would be anticipating his return, he looked upon the deception which he was practising as a pious fraud.

Ida was happy in the belief that in the absence of active and practical improvement, he was spending his time in a course of study which could not fail ultimately to secure his professional success ; while he, on his part, ill-constituted as we have shown him to be for either mental or moral exertion, easily convinced himself that he had already done all that was requisite, until the moment should arrive when his powers would be called into action.

And it was wonderful how well the world seconded his opinion ; and how many sweet smiles and hearty plaudits contributed to convince him that he was walking in the broad path of social duty.

Mr. Elphinstone waltzed so well, and acted charades so beautifully :—Sydney was such an excellent oarsman, and got up a pic-nic so admirably—he was married, to be sure, but then, he had married a woman older than himself, and

was consequently more to be pitied than blamed, for it was so easy to understand how matches of that description were arranged ; so that, after all, it was perfectly natural that he should resume his position in society, and that his wife should reconcile herself to what, under the circumstances, was inevitable.

The world, however, in its short-sighted egotism, argued too rapidly. With all the heedlessness of his age, Elphinstone was, indeed, led into a career of folly and selfish indulgence, but he nevertheless fondly loved his wife ; and it was not without much remorseful feeling that he occasionally reflected on his abuse of her confidence.

While he was engaged in archery or boating, billiards or dancing, the woman who had intrusted to him alike her happiness and her existence, was spending her hours in solitude and *ennui*, anxiously awaiting his return to a home far more humble than that of which she should have been the mistress : but, alas ! Pleasure is a syren whose voice is seldom unheeded by the young—good intentions, as we all know, are the ill-impressed mosaics which serve to floor a region that must be illimitable, if we consider the amount of paving which it absorbs—and thus, day after day, Sydney yielded to the spell ; and evening after evening he repented of his weakness only to sin again.

He was not happy ; on that point he never deceived himself ; for while he fluttered and flirted through the throng of fashion, he saw and felt that Ida, his own loved and loving wife, was fairer and dearer than any with whom he came in contact ; and when he contrasted the lax and frivolous discourse to which he listened at his club, with her pure and fascinating conversation, he despised himself for a weakness to which on the morrow he nevertheless again yielded without an effort.

Not even the flushing cheek and averted eye of Lady Mary Maitland when they occasionally met, disturbed his equanimity ; with all his faults, and they were rather the follies of youth than actual defects of character, Sydney Elphinstone was no coxcomb ; and he consequently attributed these evidences of emotion to any cause rather than the true one.

In becoming the husband of Ida Trevanion, he had given himself to her wholly, and he was fully conscious of her claim upon his undivided affection.

Still, he could not but know and feel that his position was a false one ; and that, should Ida one day discover how she had been misled by his silence, all confidence must be for ever at an end between them. He was, moreover, aware that their income could by no means suffice to their present style of living ; for while he frittered away the very limited amount which was exclusively his own, his wife, unaccustomed to economy in any shape, and totally ignorant of the real value of money, was equally expensive in her own habits, while, with proud satisfaction, she believed that by dispensing with a carriage and even a male domestic, and living in a mere cottage, all further retrenchment was unnecessary.

Never indeed, perhaps, were two individuals more thoroughly self-deluded than were Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone at this precise period. She, calmly, and patiently happy in the firm confidence that she was more than ever necessary to her husband, who, after long and weary hours of monotonous occupation, could look only to her for companionship in his brief periods of leisure ; and he in the equally baseless conviction that his friends *could* not long fail him as they had hitherto done ; and that his first brief would at once induct him into all the duties and habits of a man of business.

And meanwhile all things went on smoothly ; and even, if Ida did occasionally feel, that, read, paint, and practise as she might, the time would hang heavily upon her hands, she struggled against the weakness, resolved that Sydney should never suspect her of so puerile and selfish a folly ; and thus it was, that she constantly welcomed him to his home with a bright smile and a cheerful voice.

As her husband's day, according to the world's notion of diurnal existence, ended, her own began ; for Sydney's society was now the only dissipation and excitement to which she could look forward ; while he, on the contrary, anticipated the matrimonial *tête-à-tête* with a sense of actual enjoyment and repose that acted like a precious balm upon his conscious and worn spirit.

Not even the necessity of concealing any unusual fatigue under which he might occasionally be labouring was entailed upon him; he was not compelled either to avow or to explain it, for Ida was so convinced, when she saw him return to her with a pale cheek and an exhausted frame, that she possessed the true word of the enigma, that while anxious not to crush his moral energies by a word of pity, or a look of care which would inevitably have brought him to her feet, with a full avowal upon his lips, she only redoubled her efforts to restore his cheerfulness and become gay herself, as she remarked the unfailing effect of her endeavour.

There was much that was great in the character of Mrs. Elphinstone, too much, indeed, for her own peace, when the powers of her mind and will were called into action by imagined wrong—but which was eminently admirable when exerted for the happiness of another.

In those she loved, self was forgotten; there was no trial too bitter to be borne, no sacrifice too painful to be made, for him in whom she had garnered up her heart, while she felt that her affection was returned, freely and fully, as it had been bestowed, and without stint or limit. Thus, even her intervals of mental weariness never degenerated into moral suffering—she was happy because Sydney loved her; because he was toiling for her; because they were all in all to each other; and when she sometimes reflected how any invasion on her present solitude might involve her in doubts and suspicions, which to her jealous nature amounted to actual torture, she reproached herself for every regretful thought.

Thus wore away an entire year; and then again came spring, sweet, blossom-scented spring; and already the young leaves might be seen swelling and brightening amid the delicate tracery of the trees.

This was a season of delight to Ida, for once more she could surround herself with flowers, and scarcely a week elapsed that she did not find upon her work-table some brilliant exotic, placed there to await her waking, by the hand of her idolised husband; while, day by day, she found occupation for her pencil in the less costly blossoms of her own well-tended flower-beds.

For some months, however, she had enjoyed more of Sydney's society ; there was, as he very truthfully declared, "nothing doing," although it was probable that they did not both attach the same meaning to the phrase ; then, his chambers were dark, gloomy, and deserted, and he felt that he could read and study alike with more profit and with more pleasure under the same roof, and in the presence of his wife ; an argument of which he required no logic to convince his delighted listener.

So the confidential clerk was, officially as well as actually, invested in his government at the Temple, with the full privilege of luxuriating peacefully in both news and novels, and a portion of Mr. Elphinstone's professional library was transported to the cottage, where he actually did spend an hour or two each day in turning over their pages. That he was not more assiduous in his learned labours did not, however, excite one regret in his exulting wife, who occupied every other instant of his time.

When the sunshine tempted her to walk—and, be it known to those who know it not, there are some charming walks in that pleasant neighbourhood—he was her constant companion ; and as she hung upon his arm, the first bright days of her married life, ere the necessities of the world had torn him from her side, seemed to have come back upon her. When she was occupied at her embroidery-frame, he watched the movement of her slight and skilful fingers, and enlivened her task with a multitude of ludicrous masculine suggestions, over which they laughed together as she convinced him of their utter impracticability ; when she sang, his voice was blended with her own ; and when too happy or too indolent to provide her own amusement, he read to her from the works of some favourite author ; or, seated on a cushion at her feet, he accompanied on his guitar some of the wild romances which he had learnt in Grenada or Seville.

Such was the life they led ; and if indeed there were an adder among the roses which strewed the path of Ida, it was, for a time at least, coiled and hidden beneath the perfumed leaves.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LETTER.

"I REALLY think, love," said Sydney, on one occasion, as they returned home from a saunter through some of the quiet lanes in which they both delighted; and he spoke so gravely, and so much with the air and manner of one who has arrived at a very serious decision, that Ida involuntarily glanced up at him, marvelling what was to follow; "I really think I shall not renew my subscription at my club."

"My dear Sydney!" exclaimed his wife; "what an extraordinary resolution. What *can* be your reason?"

"I am so much more happy in your society than elsewhere."

"But consider, dearest——"

"I *have* considered, and I think that I am right."

"But the world will not think so, Sydney," persisted Mrs. Elphinstone, almost aghast; "a man without a club would be such a solecism in society. It would never do for you to lose caste just as you are endeavouring to follow your profession."

"I am quite aware of that, my dear girl; and there can be no doubt that a club has its advantages, but it is so deucedly expensive."

"Well then," said Ida, as though she were suggesting something so easily accomplished that it required no second thought, "we will curtail our expenses in some less objectionable way; for I could not endure that you should be subjected to such a privation. No, no; it is not to be thought of. Remember, too, that you may occasionally have correspondents to whom you may not consider it desirable to give your private address."

"That is probable enough," acquiesced her husband; "in which case I shall refer them to my chambers."

"Depend on it, the scheme is a bad one," insisted Ida, who, habituated to the prejudices of the particular set to which she belonged, could not comprehend that a man could pass respectably through the world, unless he conformed to all its conventionalities. "If you love me, Sydney, say no more about it. I am half angry with you for having conceived so wild an idea. Our discussion, however, reminds me that you have not been near this said club, which has suddenly become so odious to you, for the last four days; and, who knows? there may at this moment be letters awaiting you there—grave business letters—giving promise of a brief! Suppose my prophecy should prove to be a correct one, would you quarrel with the poor club again?"

"Probably not, fair tyrant."

"Then I will play the sibyl, and predict that if, in obedience to my behest, you hasten there within this very hour to claim the prize, it shall be yours; and until you return I will closet myself awhile with Glück and Beethoven; and then while away the remainder of the time in devising some expedient which shall render your late mighty project both unnecessary and impossible."

"If you are quite determined, dear Ida——"

"My will is immutable, Mr. Sydney Elphinstone; a thorough woman's will, so that you have no alternative save obedience."

"*Au revoir* then, love."

"*Au revoir et sans adieu*. I shall be quite anxious to know if I am indeed the sibyl that I feel."

"—And look!" smiled her husband, admiringly.

Ida laughed, waved her hand, and disappeared into the house.

By what strange fatality is it that, not content with awaiting our destiny, we are always so prone to assist its progress, even in our brightest and holiest hours, when we know that any change may diminish, or even destroy, our present happiness?

Mr. Elphinstone went to his club; and there, as his wife had predicted, he found a letter awaiting him. It contained,

however, no legal matter—no claim on his forensic eloquence—but that it was none the less welcome was evident from the well-pleased smile with which he perused it.

As usual, he was cordially greeted by his numerous friends; for even at that unfashionable time of year, when London was still a desert, and the season only in perspective, there are always men either too indolent to abandon the ordinary routine of their habits, or too sagacious to relinquish their club enjoyments, when they have not secured an equivalent in the well-appointed country seat of some more wealthy friend.

Sydney's heart was very light that day; Ida had appeared to him to be more lovely and more fascinating than ever; he was very partial to his club, and he had really, as he stated, begun to feel that it was a luxury too great for his means; but the arguments of his wife had been forcible enough to silence all his compunctious feelings; she had convinced him that, in justice to himself, he must maintain his proper position in society; and long before he reached St. James's Street, he had become quite of the same opinion.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of the most complete and quiet gratification, that he lounged away an hour among his gay and idle associates, skimmed over a couple of the daily papers, played half-a-dozen games at billiards, read the names of the new novels that were strewn over the library tables; and, finally, turned his face homeward.

But although it was still early when he left the club, his arrival at his own house was less punctual than was his ordinary custom; and during the half-hour which preceded it, Ida had built up a very charming little romance upon the corner-stone of her own prophecy, founded entirely on his prolonged absence.

Yes—the letter—singular as such a coincidence would unquestionably be—the letter which she had foretold, was in truth awaiting him, and he would at last have the opportunity, so long and so earnestly desired, of doing justice to his own high intellectual powers, and of justifying her choice in the eyes of all who might now seek to blame it.

Sydney, once famous, would no longer dissuade her, as

he now did, from seeking a reconciliation with her father for fame in his profession was the sure guarantee of wealth; and, consequently, he could then have no apprehension that he should be accused of mercenary motives, when sanctioning the overtures of his wife.

Perhaps Mr. Trevanion, softened by a renewed intercourse with his child, might even consent to a general amnesty, and include his uncle in his forgiveness; and then, indeed, Ida felt as though no shadow could again cross her spirit.

The past was forgotten in this brilliant day-dream; while even the present—that present, which to her was fraught with love and peace—seemed a mere period of probation, tending to a still brighter and a happier phase of existence.

Mrs. Elphinstone lay buried among the cushions of her *dormeuse*, her eyes closed, and a smile upon her lips, wandering in fancy through her old haunts, inhabiting her old home, and surrounded by her old associates, when at length the well-known and welcome step fell upon her ear, and she started up to receive her husband.

“Forgive me, Ida—” he commenced.

“Forgive you, love! For what?” was the laughing rejoinder—“For your brief delay? How could it be otherwise, when my promised letter suddenly involved you in such a whirl of pleasant occupation?”

“Were you then really aware——”

“Of course I was, rebellious unbeliever! or how could I have put wings to your heels a few hours back by my potent spell?”

“Still the letter does not mention your knowledge of the arrangement,” said Sydney, thoroughly mystified.

The low sweet laugh of his wife was her only reply.

“However,” he pursued, gaily; “you are right: the said letter did give me considerable occupation; although, with all deference to your opinion, be it said, fair lady, that I found it more essential than agreeable.”

“My poor Sydney!” said his wife, as she touched his upturned brow with her lips; “it is weary work, I have no doubt; but still——”

“You are right, dear Ida, as you ever are; still it was

my duty to undertake the task without a moment's delay ; and right glad am I that I did so, as I flatter myself that I have succeeded to admiration."

"Succeeded, Sydney!" exclaimed his wife, mystified in her turn ; "what already?"

"Yes, dear love, so you see that I was worthy of the 'winged heels.' I have secured the snuggest little box for them ; and only think——"

"We *must* be playing a game of cross-purposes," interposed Ida, becoming suddenly grave. "What were the contents of the letter?"

"What ! Is the sibyl at fault?" demanded Elphinstone ; "I was actually deluded by your manner into the belief that you knew all about it. However, here it is, read it ; and then I will tell you how I have fulfilled my appointed mission."

Ida took the paper from his hand, and her first glance at the superscription sufficed to drive the blood from her cheek ; the hand-writing was that of a woman ; she hastily drew the note from its envelope, and as hastily ran her eye over its contents, which were these :

"As I am sure that I may trust to your kindness in all things, my dear Sydney, I do not hesitate for a moment to request that you will render me an essential service. I find that the utter seclusion of our otherwise comfortable retreat, has produced a very depressing effect upon my dear child's spirits, which has reflected itself in some degree on her health. I had not calculated on the dreariness of a long winter during the previous season of leaves and sunshine, and while the near neighbourhood of your accomplished wife and yourself rendered us independent of all other society ; but I am compelled to confess that even at my age, when rain, wind, and snow confined us to the house, I felt that I had relied too much upon our home resources, and exposed my poor Edith to a trial which was both severe and unnecessary.

"What I would ask of you is, therefore, that, if practicable, you will secure for me a small but ladylike residence, consistent at once with my present means and position in life.

"I have unfortunately mislaid your address, of which I only retain the word 'Brompton.' I shall, consequently, direct my letters to your club; and leave you to offer, in my name, my very sincere apologies to Mrs. Elphinstone for this demand upon your time and energies, which I feel sure that she will pardon.

"My essentials are pure air for my dear girl, and a small garden, in which she may amuse herself with her flowers, a sight of green boughs from our windows, and a situation which will not involve us in the necessity of making acquaintance with our neighbours.

"Now it strikes me, that upon all these points Mrs. Elphinstone must have been as imperative as myself; therefore, I may sum up all my requirements by requesting you to do for me precisely what you have done for her; and I need scarcely add that if, in your own immediate neighbourhood, these requisites can be secured, I shall be doubly gratified, as we shall then have the opportunity which we both covet, of forming, as I trust, a close and endearing friendship with your amiable and gifted wife.

"Lose no time, my dear boy, in complying with my request, as I am becoming anxious about Edith; and, to own the truth, shall not be sorry myself to be brought into more immediate contact with the 'human face divine' than I have been for the last few months. Say for us all and everything that you know will be acceptable to Mrs. Elphinstone, and receive assurance of the sincere affection of your own and your mother's friend,

"CLARISSA MALCOLM."

Poor Ida! Her air-built castle was prostrate, and in the void created by its destruction, uprose a host of bitter anticipations. She had been *so* happy even in the house of her enforced solitude: and now——

She still sat silent with the fateful letter in her hand, when she was recalled to a more vivid sense of her self-inflicted suffering by the voice of her husband, who, surprised that she made no comment on its contents, suddenly discontinued his occupation of removing the decayed leaves from the plants in her *jardinière*, and exclaimed, joyously:

"Is it not charming, Ida? We only required the society of Lady Malcolm and Edith, to make our home a little Paradise; I may confess to you, now, that I reproached myself with every hour which, during my absence, condemned you to solitude; while, after their arrival I shall be able to leave you with a lighter heart, well assured that they will do all in their power to make the time pass pleasantly."

"Have I ever complained, Sydney?" asked his wife, tremulously.

"Never, dearest; and there were even moments," he replied, with a shade of compunction in his voice, "when I almost wished that you had done so; that you had told me you could not support so wearisome an existence; and that I must be less apparently regardless of your happiness."

"I should have scorned myself for such egotism," said Mrs. Elphinstone; "how could I complain, when I knew, and felt that you were compelling yourself to a life ungenial to your tastes, in order to ensure an existence of comfort and tranquillity to me?"

"No, Sydney; you do not understand me yet. There can be no solitude, no weariness for me in a home, which I know will a few hours hence be gladdened by your presence. The proud conviction that you are labouring to do justice to yourself, and to fulfil my fondest dreams, suffices, and ever must suffice, to my happiness. Do not rejoice for me, therefore, for I have nothing to desire—nothing to wish; I have made you my world, and am well content to abide in it."

There was much in the words of Ida, calculated to inflict a pang upon the heart of her husband, but of that fact she was unconscious; for a moment only, he replied by a silent caress, but soon rallying, he thanked her tenderly for her patience and forbearance; and, ever sanguine, declared his conviction that the day was not far distant when he would be enabled to repay her all.

"Only love me, Sydney," she said, "love me, and me only, and I can ask no more."

"Are you not my existence?" was his rejoinder; "does the world contain a second Ida?"

"May it never do so in your eyes," murmured his wife.

"And now let me talk to you of the Malcolms," said Sydney, as he repossessed himself of the letter, which his wife still held, and replaced it in the envelope, "for despite all your generous self-abnegation, I cannot help feeling delighted that, since you have resolved to shut yourself out altogether from the world, you will at least secure the society of two individuals who can understand and appreciate you. I need scarcely say, that after spending an hour at the club, I hastened to commence my undertaking.

"My first impulse was to hurry home, and consult you on the subject: but, on second thoughts, I resolved not to do so, lest you should volunteer to accompany me in the search, a fatigue to which I was unwilling that you should be exposed; so like a sober and experienced Benedict, I entered upon my task unaided; feeling, that as I had, on a former occasion, been successful, where my heart was even more interested, I should scarcely fail to-day."

"And you again succeeded, if I understand you rightly?" said Ida, forcing a smile.

"Beyond my hopes! Only imagine, dearest, that after having walked through a score of 'villas,' 'cottages,' 'lodges,' 'elms,' and 'oaks,' and 'roserys,' I had abandoned all thoughts of accomplishing my purpose to-day, when I was directed to the adjoining grounds, where you may remember my having drawn your attention to an avenue of acacias just bursting into leaf, and where I found, in fact, at the termination of the said acacias one of the very prettiest of all pretty cottages.

"Nothing could be better; nothing more convenient; I liked it both inside and out, and in less than ten minutes all was arranged. The house will be ready in a fortnight; and we have only to break a door through the wall which separates the two gardens, to become like one family, and to defy the prying curiosity of all the gossips of the neighbourhood."

Ida almost gasped for breath; the reality was even worse than she had anticipated: she was to make a common home with the being whom she dreaded most on earth; and that, too, without being able to advance one valid objection to the arrangement.

The vision of Edith in her pure, fresh loveliness, swam before her eyes ; she felt faint and sick at heart ; her first impression had not deceived her ; this young and apparently guileless girl was the rock upon which her married happiness was to be ultimately wrecked ; doubtless, there were scores of women even more attractive in the world than Edith Malcolm, beautiful as she was ; but Mrs. Elphinstone, with bitter ingenuity, easily convinced herself that in the hands of Edith Malcolm lay her fate.

Why, were it otherwise, when they had parted with every prospect of a prolonged separation,—for Lady Malcolm had expressed some vague intention of residing for a year or two on the continent,—why had she been pursued to her very threshold by the object of her distrust ?

Again and again did she ask herself this question ; and carefully did she note every word uttered by her husband, on the ever-recurring subject of the speedy arrival of their new neighbours ; note his undisguised exultation at the pleasure expressed by Lady Malcolm at the prospect of so soon rejoining friends for whom she felt so warm and sincere a regard ; and watch his perpetual visits to the house, and his eagerness to complete the arrangements necessary to secure their comfort.

Nothing could be more simple, nothing more natural, than that Elphinstone should both feel and act as he did ; but Ida saw and judged everything through a distorted medium ; encouraged the morbid feelings against which for the sake of her own peace she should have struggled ; and thenceforward looked with a jaundiced eye upon all that related to Lady Malcolm and her daughter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEW HOPES.

ON the day fixed for her arrival, Elphinstone was at the station, ready to escort his mother's friend to her new home. Ida had raised no objection to this arrangement; nor did she, as he gaily bade her adieu, after having assured himself that all was in due order at the cottage to receive the incoming tenants, sadden his pleasant anticipations by a look or a word of discouragement; although she was conscious, as she watched his departure, of a feeling of restlessness and indisposition for which she could only account by supposing, that the near approach of the trial to which she had been looking forward with dread for the last fortnight, had produced a painful effect upon her nerves.

Anxious, therefore, to conquer what she considered as a weakness unworthy of her, and peculiarly ill-timed at a moment when she required the exertion of all her energies, she resolutely abandoned her sofa, shook off the oppression which was stealing over her, and endeavoured to divert her thoughts by personally superintending the preparations which were making in her little household to welcome the expected guests, who were to spend their first evening under her roof.

With her own hands she arranged fresh flowers in the vases, gave a more graceful fall to the soft draperies of the windows, and selected from a pile of music such compositions as she knew to be peculiar favourites with Miss Malcolm.

It was a species of voluntary martyrdom which she thus inflicted upon herself; but true to her dignity as a wife, and anxious that the home of her husband should be worthy, even in its simplicity, both of him and of herself, she resolutely pursued her task until her sense of physical

suffering became so great that, unable longer to struggle against it, she was compelled to ring for assistance.

A succession of fainting-fits, alarming from their duration, at length so terrified her two attendants that one of them hastened to procure professional advice; and ere she was sufficiently restored to consciousness to forbid it, she found the solitude of her cottage invaded by the presence of a stranger.

"It will be nothing, positively nothing," said a low pleasant voice, as the application of a powerful stimulant aroused her once more from the torpor into which she had fallen; "come, my dear madam, do me the favour to swallow a few drops of this essence; and believe me when I assure you that in an hour or two you will be perfectly restored."

Ida languidly opened her eyes, and raised herself into a sitting posture; she was still too weak to give utterance to a syllable, but she felt soothed, and as the large tears fell slowly on her cheeks, she slightly averted her head to escape the look of involuntary admiration which was fixed upon her.

"Over-excitement, no doubt," pursued her visitor, "but you must control your feelings, my dear young lady, you must indeed; it is absolutely essential that you should do so. Gentle exercise, cheerful society, and the new interest which existence now offers to you, will be your best physicians."

Mrs. Elphinstone glanced at him inquiringly.

The physician smiled. "Leave me for a moment alone with your lady," he said to the maid, who still lingered beside her mistress, and who instantly withdrew.

"I cannot be deceived, my dear madam," pursued the old gentleman, as he seated himself near her, "in believing that I am the harbinger of good tidings. You are about to become a mother."

Ida sprang to her feet, and pressed her hands tightly together, while a smile of triumphant happiness lit up her countenance into almost unearthly beauty. In the excess of her joy she almost gasped for breath; then, after one long gaze into the venerable face of her companion, she

sank upon her knees, and buried her burning brow among the cushions of the sofa.

Dr. Darnell neither spoke nor moved, until the vehement sobs by which her whole frame was convulsed had gradually subsided, and then, after having strictly enjoined an hour or two of perfect repose, he rose, and took his leave.

As the door closed behind him, Ida sprang from the floor and hurried to her own room, where, having carefully locked the door, she felt secure from all intrusion.

She needed to be alone with her new-born happiness—to dream of it—to dwell on it—Edith Malcolm was forgotten; she could think only of her child—of Sydney's child—of the sacred tie which was about to bind them a thousand-fold more closely together.

There was no faintness at her heart now; her pulses throbbed with an emotion which defied alike sickness and sorrow; life was all brightness, the future all sunshine; rest! how could she rest? with a fevered cheek and a kindling eye, she paced up and down her chamber, until at length exhausted nature gave way beneath the violence of her excitement, and, casting herself upon the bed, she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

She was still buried in this death-like slumber when Mr. Elphinstone and his guests arrived, and great was the alarm excited in the whole party by the tidings which awaited them—an alarm which was increased almost to agony in the breast of Sydney, when, on rushing up stairs, he found the door of his wife's chamber shut against him.

His voice, however, soon aroused Ida, who hastened to admit him with a cheek so bright and an eye so radiant that he started back in surprise.

"They told me that you were ill, my own love," he exclaimed, as he drew her towards him—"ill, very ill, my Ida. Why did they torture me by such a fable?—You are not, you cannot be ill. Only tell me that——"

"No, no, Sydney, I am not ill: I am quite well, and oh! so happy!"

"But what mystery is this, dearest? You cannot imagine the torture which I endured until I once more saw you beside me."

"Mystery!" echoed Ida, with a bright blush, as she pillowed her cheek upon his shoulder, "oh, there is no mystery; I have been weak, very weak, since you left me, and played the woman, I believe, sufficiently to faint and terrify our ignorant Abigail; but I have slept since then, and, as you see, am perfectly recovered. But we must not forget our guests; return to them at once, dear Sydney, while I gather up my dishevelled hair, and make myself presentable."

"Ida, you cannot deceive me," said Sydney, uneasily, "you are feverish and excited."

"It is nothing," was the laughing reply, "I have had a dream, which I may perhaps confide to you hereafter if you obey me now."

"A dream—" murmured her husband, still only half convinced, "and you will not tell me the true meaning of your evident emotion?"

"Not now, not now; remember that you are about, for the first time since our marriage, to play the host in your own house: you owe yourself to your friends; go, and acquaint yourself with your new duties, and I will join you within an instant."

Elphinstone reluctantly obeyed, and his agitated account of his brief interview with his wife by no means prepared Lady Malcolm, who during his absence had questioned the attendant on the subject of her mistress's indisposition, for the bright and radiant appearance of Ida, who shortly afterwards entered the room with a glad smile and an elastic step, to offer at once her apology and her welcome.

If Lady Malcolm had occasionally thought the manner of Mrs. Elphinstone uncertain and capricious, she certainly found no cause to do so on the present occasion. Nothing could exceed the courteous urbanity of the young hostess, who did the honours of her house with a frank and cordial kindness which at once diffused its charm over the whole party; and ere long the conversation became as gay and animated as though no heart in that little circle had ever known care or doubt.

From that time the health of Mrs. Elphinstone became so delicate that she was seldom able to leave the house; but

it is nevertheless certain that, had she been less ingenious in self-tormenting, this would have been one of the happiest periods of her life.

The devotion of her exulting husband, who watched every look and anticipated every wish; the gentle and unwearied kindness of Lady Malcolm, who was her constant companion; and the pretty playfulness of Edith, who came and went in the sick-room like a sunbeam, brightening and gladdening all around her, were well calculated to divest even indisposition of its dreariness.

But the very charm shed over the party by the presence of the fair girl who was never weary of ministering to her comfort, was a perpetual source of wretchedness to Ida, as with closed eyes she lay upon the sofa, contrasting in her own mind the buoyant graces of Edith, her unimpaired health, and elastic spirits, with her own faded beauty and depressed energies.

The two small households had, indeed, as Sydney had anticipated, become like one family; and while his wife was too languid for any exertion beyond skimming over a few pages of some favourite book, or listening, while Lady Malcolm relieved her of even that slight fatigue, Edith assisted Elphinstone to tend her flowers, feed her birds, and perform all those graceful little duties in which she had herself hitherto taken delight.

Every hour in the day they were together, generally engaged in the same pursuit, and evidently interested in the same objects. They played, sang, and drew, together; and although Ida was present, still it was with a bitter pang that she saw them thus engaged, and felt that their mutual enjoyment was independent of herself.

Occasionally, Elphinstone would stroll down to his club; and at long intervals, he even extended his walk to the Temple, in the vague hope of hearing from his clerk that some strange foot had passed the threshold of his chambers; but no; every new visit was only a new disappointment; and even sanguine as he was, there were moments when he felt sick at heart, and began to ask himself how all this must end!

Town was filling rapidly, and whenever he made his

appearance in his old haunts, he was overwhelmed with invitations but he no longer suffered himself to be seduced into dissipation.

Since the arrival of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, he had never passed a weary hour, and he consequently resisted the importunities of his friends without an effort, quite satisfied in his own mind that it was the present situation of Ida, which had invested his home with a new charm.

As time passed, a fresh trial awaited Mrs. Elphinstone, to which she submitted in silence, anxious to conceal from the observant eyes of Lady Malcolm the weakness which, painful as it was to endure, would, as she was well aware, appear not only ridiculous but even offensive in the eyes of others.

During one of his daily visits, Mr. Darnell—for Sydney had at once declared constant attendance upon his wife to be essential,—was struck by an appearance of languor in the voice and movements of Edith which was foreign to her usual habit; and after having watched her attentively for a few seconds, he said, in a tone of gentle decision:—

“I cannot afford, young lady, to have two patients in one house, and therefore I have to request that you will take more exercise. You are young and active, but in order to benefit by your energies, you must develope them. You are here in excellent air, I admit; but you must not always breathe the same atmosphere. You must walk, change the scene, and lay in a stock of new ideas, for the mind requires employment as well as the body. Have you been to the Exhibition yet? No! well then go to-morrow; it is well worth a visit; and as you are an artist yourself, you cannot fail to pass an hour or two delightfully.

“Here is Mr. Elphinstone, an idle man, of whom his wife will be glad to be rid now and then; you could not have a better escort. Follow my prescription, and I shall find your cheeks a little brighter when we next meet.”

Sydney was enchanted by the proposition, and eagerly offered his services, which were as frankly accepted by Lady Malcolm, who looked upon the son of her friend as her own; and while Ida drove back the tears of jealous mortification and annoyance which sprang to her eyes, as she

witnessed the pleasure evinced by the rest of the party, it was finally decided that should Mrs. Elphinstone be sufficiently well on the following day for her husband to leave her without uneasiness, and the weather prove propitious, the plan of the worthy physician should be carried out.

As may be anticipated, this first absence of Sydney and Edith was succeeded by many others; the benefit derived by her child from moderate exercise and mental occupation led Lady Malcolm to overlook the possibility that Mrs. Elphinstone might be less gratified by the arrangement than herself; and as Ida carefully abstained from all expostulation, no suspicion of the truth ever intruded itself upon her mind.

At length the event so anxiously anticipated by all, took place, and Elphinstone, to his unmeasured delight, found himself the father of a noble boy; while even Ida herself, victim as she was of a diseased imagination, felt for a time alike proud and happy.

"Would," she murmured to Lady Malcolm, who sat beside her bed, "would that my father could see this precious babe. He would take me to his heart again; I am sure he would; for I now feel what it is to be a parent."

"Do not despair," was the whispered reply; "rely on it that, estranged as Mr. Trevanion may seem to be, he is not ignorant of anything which affects your welfare or happiness: and therefore, like yourself, I look forward with a hope that this dear boy will prove a new and lasting bond between you."

As Mrs. Elphinstone shortly afterwards sank into a deep and refreshing sleep, Lady Malcolm sat for a time in earnest thought; and then, relinquishing her post to the sick-nurse, hastened home, and rapidly wrote and sealed a letter, which she at once dispatched to the post-office by a servant.

Admitted as she had now been for a considerable time into the intimacy of Mr. Elphinstone's family, and fully acquainted as she was with the extent of his resources, Lady Malcolm had felt many misgivings as she noted the slight value which was attached to money by either himself or his wife, and their total ignorance of its real capabilities.

More than once she had been on the point of hinting her

apprehensions to Sydney, but the subject was one of so delicate a nature, that, despite her better judgment, she had shrunk from the task. Now, however, she believed that she had discovered a method of assisting the young couple without wounding their pride; for she felt that, let Mr. Trevanion resent his daughter's marriage as relentlessly as he might, still he could not be insensible to the gratification of learning that he had a grandson, or sufficiently regardless of his own dignity to suffer the child to be reared in obscurity and indigence.

Nor did she deceive herself; for although he in due time acknowledged her communication coldly and briefly, without comment of any kind, many days did not elapse before a packet was delivered to Mrs. Elphinstone, directed in a business-like hand, with which she was totally unacquainted, and containing a bank-post bill for a thousand pounds. Great was the astonishment, both of Sydney and his wife, and numerous were their conjectures; while a shade of mortification lessened the happiness which such a gift at such a moment could not fail to afford; for a sense of obligation, be it to whom it may, is always galling to a proud spirit; but still they could not but acknowledge to themselves that never had so generous an offering been made more opportunely.

Nevertheless, however, the mystery was a painful one; and when Lady Malcolm, anxious to soothe their irritated feelings, ventured to suggest that it was in all probability a present from Mr. Trevanion to his future heir, Ida eagerly embraced the idea, and began once more to dream of pardon and reconciliation.

Her recovery was rapid. Never weary of watching over her infant, she sat with him for hours upon her knees; while Sydney, as much engrossed as herself by his new happiness, appeared to have lost all interest in existence, save that which centred in his wife and child. Sometimes, although reluctantly, the young mother would resign her precious charge for a time to Lady Malcolm; but when Edith would occasionally plead for the same privilege, Ida, gently but firmly, declined to place him in her arms, alleg-

ing as her excuse that she was too timid to trust him to any one who was not accustomed to children.

It was her first revenge, and she had not strength of mind to forego it.

Sydney was, as we have said, wholly engrossed for a time by his little son, but it is not in the nature of any man, however kind and affectionate, to emulate the persevering love and devotion of a mother. As time wore on, therefore, his old tastes and habits resumed their sway, and he no longer spent hours beside the little cot, in which, nestled amid lace and cambric, lay the tiny object of so many cares and hopes.

While Ida was still fully occupied in registering every look and movement of the babe, Sydney had resumed his walks, his music, and his gardening; and in all these pursuits Edith was, as formerly, his companion; nor was it long ere Mrs. Elphinstone, even amid her pre-occupation, had fully succeeded in convincing herself that her co-operation in their several employments was requested rather as a matter of courtesy than of choice; never suspecting, how often her husband felt jealous of the absorbing affection for her child, which appeared to have weaned her heart from him.

Poor Edith! she was so childlike and so innocent that no thought of evil ever paled the roses on her cheek, or palsied her young heart. She loved Mrs. Elphinstone sincerely, and admired her with the fervour which only youth can feel. Little did she imagine that to the object of her regard she was herself a source of bitter and perpetual suspicion; little did she imagine that the mind which she believed to be so lofty had degraded itself by the admission of one impure idea, and that her image was interwoven with it.

So true it is that even those with whom we are most intimately connected never know us as we really are: to them we are what we desire to seem; into our inner life they cannot penetrate, and thus society is, in point of fact, a clever masquerade, in which the ablest actors play the highest parts, and wear their motley the most gracefully.

Now and then the pressure of circumstance may rend

away a portion of the drapery from each and all, but still much remains concealed, until the game of life is played out, and goes down even to the grave at once undetected and unsuspected.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THE grace and beauty of Mrs. Elphinstone, the manly bearing of her husband, and the refinement of everything about them, had singularly excited the interest of Dr. Darnell, who was well able to appreciate such qualities in those with whom he came into contact.

That their pecuniary resources were by no means equivalent to their pretensions he at once discovered, although no inference to that effect had ever escaped from either; and that some mystery was connected with the little household he felt satisfied, while, at the same time, the intimacy which existed between the Elphinstones and the somewhat stately Lady Malcolm, together with the presence of her young daughter, sufficed to convince him that it could not be one of a discreditable nature.

Thus, there was a certain romance flung over his new friends, which tended to heighten rather than to diminish the feeling of affectionate regard that he soon experienced for them, and which led him ultimately to express an anxious hope that their accidental acquaintance might be suffered to grow into friendship.

"I am no longer a young man, my dear madam," he said, affectionately taking the hand of Ida; "but my heart has not run so rapid a race as time; it can still sympathise in the happiness of others, and exult in sharing it. As I can no longer keep you as a patient, I am anxious to retain you as a friend; I will, indeed, be frank enough to confess to you without disguise that I cannot coldly look forward to the loss of your society just as I have learnt to value it."

"You have only anticipated my own intention, my good friend," was the cordial reply of Mrs. Elphinstone ; "for, believe me, when I assure you that I am far from insensible to the charm of your conversation, or to the peculiar benefit which constant intimacy with a person of your character and principles cannot fail to confer on so young and inexperienced an individual as my husband, who, with the warmest heart and the noblest nature upon earth, is ill calculated to wrestle with the world single-handed."

"So be it then, my dear lady ; from this hour we sink the physician in the friend," said the doctor, heartily ; "and I trust that neither party will ever have cause to repent the compact."

And Ida judged rightly when she declared that the friendship of Dr. Darnell must prove valuable to Sydney, for Dr. Darnell was no common character. Possessed of admirable taste and good practical common-sense, he had seen enough of the folly and frippery of fashionable life to estimate it at its true value, and had sufficient moral courage to avow that he could and did relish the charm of unaffected simplicity alike in speech and principle.

Unfortunately, however, the proffered friendship of the estimable and somewhat eccentric physician involved, as a natural consequence, the acquaintanceship of his wife, who, although a well-meaning woman, was extremely weak, and, like all weak people, fancied herself more clear-sighted and judicious than every one about her.

Her pretty person, and still more, perhaps, her modest fortune, had proved irresistible to the young doctor ; at a period when he was striving to establish himself in his profession ; and thus two persons as widely sundered as the poles both in taste and intellect had been united in a life-long tie which it was idle to lament when, in after-years, both discovered their mistake.

Dr. Darnell, frequent as his visits had been to the cottage of the Elphinstones, had discovered nothing there but what, to a mind constituted like his own, was genial and charming ; but it was far otherwise with his lady, who was never happy save when she was peering below the surface of

things, and detecting some hidden rock beneath the apparently placid waves.

Her husband had forewarned her that, although evidently persons of high-breeding and elegant habits, Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone were apparently far from affluent, and strictly cautioned her to avoid all reference to the fact; nor did she fail to give a promise to that effect, even while she exulted in the consciousness that, on this one point at least, there could be no rivalry between them.

A greater contrast to the calm and gentle Lady Malcolm could scarcely have presented itself in the drawing-room of Ida, than the little, fussy, gaily-attired wife of the staid middle-aged doctor. If there were one fact which more than every other Mrs. Darnell had been unable to comprehend, it was the ravages produced by time upon her once blooming face and graceful figure; and thus, in her fiftieth year she assumed the dress and aped the manner of fifteen.

Too thoroughly self-possessed to be absolutely vulgar, her little affectations were simply ridiculous; and Ida scarcely knew whether to be amused or annoyed by the absurdities of her new acquaintance.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Darnell was perfectly in her element, as she watched with a keen eye every member of the little party, caressed the baby with voluble comments on his extraordinary loveliness, congratulated Lady Malcolm on the acquisition of Acacia Lodge, and examined with all the assumed gusto of an artist the sketch upon which Edith was engaged, and which chanced to be the one with Mrs. Elphinstone's figure in the foreground.

"Well! this is really very nice," she exclaimed, patronisingly, "very nice indeed. You have a charming talent. I absolutely do not think that I ever saw a more graceful figure."

"It is indeed admirably executed," said Edith; "but I regret to be compelled to confess," she added, ingenuously, "that my little sketch is indebted to Mr. Elphinstone for its greatest ornament. The scene is one dear to us all, and the portrait is, as you have probably discovered, that of his wife."

"Of course it is; no one could mistake it for a moment,"

acquiesced the visitor, "and how very delightful it must be for you, Miss Malcolm, to have so skilful an assistant in your studies."

The remark was common-place enough, but the glance turned upon Ida as the words were uttered was infinitely more significant; an expression of blended pity and surprise could be read for an instant in the keen eyes which were riveted upon her, and beneath which her own fell, while she felt the warm blood rush to her cheek and brow.

By that one look, Mrs. Darnell had justified Ida to her own conscience. She did not pause to reflect upon the impertinence, should she indeed have read the glance aright, of such an inference on the part of a perfect stranger; she did not dwell on the ill-breeding, or, still worse, on the ill-feeling, which could have prompted a suspicion of evil where all was apparently frank and simple; she forgot, as by magic, the wonder and almost disgust with which she had regarded the lady half an hour previously; she only felt that her secret had been read, and that one individual at least could sympathise in her suffering.

From that moment Mrs. Darnell became in her eyes invested with an interest which produced an immediate effect upon her whole manner; her flippant nothings were rewarded by a smile; her offers of friendship were graciously acknowledged; and when she at length rose to take her leave, she was warmly pressed to repeat her visit.

As Sydney conducted the lady to her carriage, Lady Malcolm looked up quietly from her knitting, and asked demurely:—

"Well, my dear, what do you think of your new acquaintance?"

As her mother spoke, Edith also glanced towards Mrs. Elphinstone, while a smile, requiring only one word of encouragement, twinkled in her eye and quivered about her lips, but it faded beneath a look of astonishment as Ida calmly answered:—

"I think her both pretty and pleasant."

The surprise of Lady Malcolm equalled that of her daughter. That Mrs. Elphinstone, who she well knew to be even hyper-fastidious in her tastes, should not only

tolerate, but actually profess to admire a woman so conspicuously deficient in all the attributes of high-breeding, was an enigma which she felt herself unable to solve.

"Pretty, perhaps," she said, "yes, undoubtedly she must have been pretty—once; but pleasant, my dear! Can you really think her pleasant?"

"Very pleasant," persisted Ida, "and I am, moreover, convinced that she is sincere and warm-hearted."

"Upon that point I must defer my judgment," said Lady Malcolm, "and, as she has promised me the honour of a visit in my turn, I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of doing her justice."

"I am so sick of the empty conventionalities of the world," was the rejoinder of Ida, "that it is really refreshing to me to meet with a person so thoroughly unsophisticated as Mrs. Darnell. In the artificial state of society in the present day it is difficult to distinguish friends from foes, or a seeming kindness from a secret wrong."

"Come, come, you must not encourage such gloomy ideas," said Lady Malcolm; "take a fancy to this fussy little dame if you will, for it will serve to amuse you, but do not on that account misjudge the rest of the world."

Ida smiled somewhat bitterly, and rang for her baby.

Meanwhile, the unsophisticated wife of the worthy physician was rolling towards home in her well-appointed chariot, a self-gratulatory light gleaming in her restless eyes.

"So, so," she mentally exclaimed, "the poor doctor has, then, with all his boasted penetration, frequented these people for months, and never suspected the truth. Good, easy man! So this, then, is the earthly paradise that he taught me to expect. Paradise, indeed—a new Eden with a new serpent; but its fangs shall be drawn, if it depends on me. Infamous! So beautiful as she is, that her worthless husband should be flirting—and, for what I know to the contrary, perhaps even intriguing—with that demure-looking girl, before her face; and the mother sitting by, too, looking as calm and as stately as if she were not giving her countenance to such an enormity!

“And they flatter themselves that the poor injured wife does not suspect the truth—does not see the looks which pass between them, nor how perfectly they understand each other; but they are deceived; she does more than suspect; she knows it, or why should she have shrunk when our eyes met, and then suddenly become so friendly in her manner?”

“There is no mystery there, at least; she saw that I had discovered the truth, and that I felt for her, which no one else does.

“Poor thing! Poor thing! well, my duty is plain; I will not leave a stone unturned to serve her; and I know that it will ease her poor breaking heart to pour out all her grief to me. I will call on her again in a day or two. I shall be so delighted to give her comfort.”

And fully satisfied with herself and her own good intentions, Mrs. Darnell proceeded to pay another visit.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

“I HAVE brought you some visitors, Mrs. Elphinstone,” said Lady Malcolm one morning, as she entered the drawing-room of Ida unannounced; “and most welcome ones, I feel convinced.”

The young mother, who had been bending over the couch upon which her boy lay asleep, looked up in surprise; but before she could reply, her eye met that of Sir Jasper Trevanion, who at that instant passed the threshold of the apartment.

“Sir Jasper Trevanion!” she exclaimed, as she sprang forward to meet him; “this is indeed an unexpected pleasure; and my cousin too!” she added, as she extended her disengaged hand to his son, by whom he was closely followed.

“You will forgive us this intrusion, I know,” said the

baronet, as he led his niece back to her seat; "when I tell you that since our first and only meeting, I have vainly endeavoured to ascertain your place of residence; which we at last learned to-day from Lady Malcolm."

"I was not aware that you were known to each other," said Ida.

"Oh, we are old and tried friends," was the reply, "but we will talk of that another time. And now tell me, my dear niece, are you well? are you happy?"

Ida pointed with an exulting smile to her sleeping child.

"I am answered," said Sir Jasper; "he is indeed all that a mother's heart can wish. Look at him, Hubert, is he not worthy of the Trevanion blood?"

"Hubert!" exclaimed Ida, with a kindling eye; "is it possible, my dear sir, that your son bears the name of my father?"

"It is an old family name," said the baronet, more coldly than he had yet spoken; "we have been Huberts and Jaspers from time immemorial, and I was too thorough a Trevanion not to respect the prejudices of my ancestors."

There was a painful pause, for Mrs. Elphinstone too readily understood the full meaning of the words to which she had just listened; but eager to diminish their effect, she turned with forced gaiety towards her cousin, saying, reproachfully, "And you, Mr. Trevanion, have you not, also, a word of praise for my little nursling?"

As she asked the question, she for the first time looked steadily into the face of the young man, and was startled by the change which she perceived in his appearance.

He was still superbly handsome, but a settled flush, too deep and too brilliant for health, gave a fevered expression to his countenance, which was heightened by the unnatural brightness of his eyes.

A pang smote upon the heart of Ida as she met the radiant smile with which he replied to her inquiry; and she involuntarily glanced from him to his father. No symptom of alarm or uneasiness could, however, be detected in the look or manner of the baronet. It was evident that if her terrible surmise were a correct one, it had as yet never awakened one suspicion in his mind.

"You must forgive me, my dear niece," said Sir Jasper, after having suffered his eye to wander over the well-arranged but still modest apartment, "if I appear more unreasonable than my relationship may seem to warrant. You have a pretty home, and the hand of taste is visible in all its arrangements; but still I cannot help thinking that it is not precisely the home suited to *my* niece. Tell me truly; have you no wish which it may be in my power to gratify?"

"None," replied Ida, in a tone which she strove to render calm, but which still betrayed a shade of bitterness; "I am already, perhaps, more fortunate than a discarded daughter had any right to expect. I am quite satisfied with my destiny."

"Yet you had every reason to anticipate——"

"Pardon me if I request of you not to speculate on the past: I made my own future, and I look forward to it without one misgiving."

"You are right, quite right; I am rebuked for my worldliness—the philosophy of the heart is the only true one. And who are to be the sponsors of this noble boy?" pursued the baronet, as the child awoke, and laughed in the face of his mother. "If not too late, I should be delighted to offer my own services."

Tears filled the eyes of Mrs. Elphinstone, but they were tears of joy, as she replied, "Then, indeed, will one of my most earnest desires be fulfilled: of the other I have, unfortunately, no hopes."

"Well, well," said Sir Jasper, cheerfully, "thus much at least is arranged, and I assure you that I shall be sincerely proud of my godson."

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Ida; "oh! you know not of what a heavy load you have relieved my heart."

"And I?" asked Mr. Trevanion, one of whose fingers was clasped in the plump little palm of the infant; "may I venture to present myself as the substitute of the favoured individual who has excited the implied regrets of my fair cousin?"

Ida extended her hand to him in silence; her heart was too full for words.

"An excellent arrangement," said Sir Jasper, "and one which induces me to waive one of my rights in favour of my son, my dear niece. I was about to make it a point that you should give my name to your boy; but we will call him Hubert—for many reasons it may, perhaps, be desirable."

"Nothing could be better," observed Lady Malcolm, "and as this little cherub is to be my godson also, we can at once decide that henceforth he is to be known as Sydney Hubert Elphinstone."

"Hubert Sydney," said his mother, in a low but decided voice.

"Right, right," smiled the baronet, evidently much gratified, "and, the next time, we will have Sydney Jasper, will we not, Master Hubert? See the young rogue, how heartily he enters into the conspiracy against his younger brother. By Jove, madam, he is already a Trevanion from head to heel."

It had been long, very long, since Ida had felt so intensely happy. The consciousness of isolation which had pressed so painfully upon her since she had become a voluntary exile from her father's house seemed suddenly removed, and she forgot that her uncle and his son were in reality strangers, while remembering that they were the only relatives who still acknowledged her claim.

In that hour she had only one regret, and that was induced by the absence of her husband, who had unfortunately yielded to the request of Dr. Darnell that he would accompany him several miles into the country, where he had been called to a patient; and who thus missed a meeting which his wife ardently desired should have taken place.

As Sir Jasper Trevanion was anxious to leave town within a few hours, the visit was necessarily a brief one, but it left a cheering impression on the mind and spirits of Ida, who, after the departure of the gentlemen, inquired, with natural curiosity, of Lady Malcolm, why she had hitherto made a mystery of her friendship with her uncle's family.

"I will tell you," was the frank reply: "the General and Sir Jasper were college companions, and, in after-life, firm friends. Such friends, indeed, that it was proposed between them, in the event of the arrangement becoming possible, that an union should take place between their children. Sir Archibald had more than once mentioned the subject to me, but it was one which I did not encourage, as, in my secret heart, I had, at that period, different views for Edith; and as it was a point upon which he did not insist, I considered myself, after his death, exonerated from the fulfilment of a promise which I confess that I regarded merely as the caprice of two young men who had expressed an idle wish, rather than entered into a serious compact.

"Some time ago, however, my own reasons against the proposed marriage were removed by circumstances, and, consequently, when Sir Jasper, disregarding the decline of our fortunes, recently wrote with a generosity which I could not fail to appreciate, to suggest that our children should meet, and that we should thus enable ourselves to judge whether the proposed union should tend to their mutual happiness, I assented at once."

"And what has been the result?" asked Ida, thoughtfully.

"It is, as yet, impossible to say. They have met but three times; still I cannot but think that a young and disengaged heart must do justice to the attractive qualities of Hubert Trevanion; while, with the partial affection of a mother, I am equally inclined to believe that Edith, on her side, is well calculated to inspire a sincere and lasting attachment."

"This is all very strange," said Mrs. Elphinstone, moodily; "nor, I confess, can I yet comprehend why, when aware of my connection with the Trevanions, you should have maintained so extraordinary a silence regarding this contemplated marriage."

"And yet I do not think that on reflection you will consider my reserve as singular. A thousand circumstances might have occurred to render the union undesirable, or

even impossible ; in which case, delicacy demanded silence on both sides : a feeling in which Sir Jasper and I alike concurred."

"I am obliged to admit the truth of your reasoning," said Ida ; "but may I, without impertinence, inquire how Lady Trevanion, who has been represented to me as a purse-proud and overbearing person, has been induced to consent to the marriage of her only son with a young lady, who, however beautiful and fascinating, is, as you yourself have assured me, almost without fortune?"

"Lady Trevanion, my dear," said her companion, "has now been dead upwards of a year. "She was indisposed at the period of your marriage ; and from that illness she never rallied. The retirement in which you have subsequently lived could alone have kept you in ignorance of the event."

"This is indeed a day of revelations !" exclaimed Ida ; "and now that you are kind enough to enlighten me upon so many points connected with my own family, I may perhaps be forgiven if I inquire the reason of your original reluctance to bestow the hand of your daughter upon my cousin."

"I had wished her to marry elsewhere," repeated Lady Malcolm, gravely, but without hesitation.

"Did you, then, alter your opinion of the person for whom you designed her?"

"By no means."

"This is more enigmatical than all the rest."

"The resolution of the enigma is simple, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, the gentleman in question selected another wife."

"Ha !"

There was silence for a moment, a gloom had gathered upon the brow of Lady Malcolm, who was evidently buried in deep and painful thought ; while the life-blood of Ida had sprung from her heart to her cheek, and burned there like a lava-flood.

Sydney, then, was the husband that she had coveted for her daughter ! Sydney was the idol at whose shrine Edith was to have worshipped !

"It is to be hoped," she said at length, with an ambiguous smile, "that the happy individual to whom you allude, will have no reason to repent his precipitation."

"I fervently trust that he never may!" was the half-unconscious reply.

"Perhaps had he known your flattering intentions in his favour——"

"He never even guessed—he never will guess—the visions of a mother's heart," interposed Lady Malcolm; "I have reason to believe that he is happy—very happy—and in that conviction I forget my own disappointment."

"And Edith?"

"Edith knows nothing whatever of the circumstance."

"That, at least, is fortunate; but the gentleman himself?"

"Is in equal ignorance."

"And the unfortunate woman who has so unconsciously traversed your projects?"

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone! 'exclaimed her companion. "How do you imagine that she, of all persons upon earth, could ever have fathomed the secrets of my heart? A perfect stranger, whose very name was unknown to me before her marriage."

"There is more romance in the world than we are willing to believe," said Ida, "and I confess that I am woman enough to rejoice that poor Sydney was not thus predestined to another and a brighter fate when he made me his wife. It would scarcely be a comfortable reflection."

"I respect you too much to reply by one word of flattery to such a remark," observed Lady Malcolm, courteously, but with a sudden suspicion that she had been somewhat unguarded in her communications; "yet I may nevertheless admit that it is not the fate of every man to become the husband of such a woman as yourself. You can have nothing to regret—nothing to apprehend."

The eyes of Mrs. Elphinstone were riveted upon her as she spoke, but she remained calm and self-possessed under the scrutiny.

"I am grateful for your good opinion," was the cold rejoinder; "and although we were talking of the romance of

real life, believe me I have no ambition to become a heroine; regret is a weakness which I should scorn, and apprehension a folly for which I should despise myself.—And so Edith is to be my cousin! How delighted Sydney will be when I tell him of our meditated relationship.”

Although the voice of Mrs. Elphinstone had suddenly assumed a gaiety little in unison with its previous tone, Lady Malcolm felt uneasy and embarrassed; nor was the feeling diminished by a consciousness that she could not in any way account for the impression which it produced upon her.

Perfectly true and right-minded, she never for a moment suspected that her motives were misjudged, and her meaning distorted by one to whom she had shown nothing save affection, and consequently she could only explain the manner of Mrs. Elphinstone by the painful apprehension that there lay hidden beneath the grace and beauty for which Ida was so eminently distinguished, a defect of temper which must sooner or later prove the destruction of Sydney's peace.

She admitted this fear with reluctance, but still it grew upon her, as day by day she watched the clouded brow of Mrs. Elphinstone, and detected the shade of sarcasm which gave point to words otherwise trivial in themselves.

“Poor boy!” she mentally exclaimed, “secure as he now is in his unconscious happiness, a bitter day of trial awaits him yet.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FIRST QUARREL.

“AND I have still more news for you, Sydney,” said his wife, on his return home; and she informed him of the unexpected visit of her relatives, and their proposals to become sponsors to her boy; and while speaking she narrowly watched the effect of her words; “our little friend, Edith, is to be the wife of Hubert Trevanion.”

“By Jove! he is a lucky fellow!” was the reply of Elphinstone, as his cheek became flushed with genuine pleasure.

"Very," pursued Ida, "that is, of course, should the marriage ever take place, which I confess appears improbable."

"Why so?" was the eager inquiry.

"Because," she continued, "if I am not greatly mistaken, my poor cousin's days are numbered."

"My dear Ida, what can have induced so fearful an apprehension?"

"The unnatural and settled flush upon his cheek, and the extraordinary brightness of his eyes. I am familiar with the symptoms, Sydney. Hubert Trevanion is consumptive."

"Poor dear Edith!" murmured Elphinstone.

"You should rather, I think, say, poor dear Hubert!" exclaimed his wife, impatiently.

"And so I do, my love, I pity them both from my soul; but my instant sympathy for Edith grew out of the conviction of what my own feelings would have been had I lost you under such circumstances, when my whole heart was full of joy and hope." And as he spoke, Elphinstone fondly drew his wife to his bosom, and pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Nonsense, Sydney," she exclaimed, only half appeased; "you cannot for one moment suppose that child to be capable of so engrossing an affection as you describe."

"You are greatly mistaken. I have, as you know, seen Edith alike in her grave and in her gay moments—I remember her as a mere girl, before there existed any necessity to conceal her real feelings, and then she was warm-hearted to impetuosity; I have studied her since, and even amid the trammels of what are considered, and perhaps justly so, the proprieties of society, I am convinced that there is a depth and intensity in her character, which no one who knew her less intimately than ourselves, would even suspect, veiled as it is, beneath her mild and gentle manner."

"You are a profound student, Sydney."

Elphinstone laughed.

"In her case, perhaps I am," he said, "for it has been to me a very interesting study."

"And a profitable one, no doubt."

"I hope so; for the contemplation of excellence cannot fail to be profitable; and depend upon it, that the more insight you obtain into that girl's heart, the more you will love her."

"One love satisfies me."

"Traitor!" said Sydney, playfully, "when not a day passes that you do not compel me to feel jealous of our boy."

"Jealous!" echoed Ida; "oh! Sydney, tell me the truth—are you, could you ever be jealous?"

"Not of you, dearest," replied her husband, in a voice of the deepest tenderness: "not of you—I should hate myself were I capable of such a heresy; but still I confess to the egotism of murmuring against all and everything which distracts your attention from myself. Come now, confess—have I not some reason to complain of that riotous urchin who has usurped all my rights? Does he not occupy almost every hour of your time?"

"But you have found other occupation, Sydney."

"You compelled me to it. I love the boy dearly—of that you need no assurance—but, were it not that he has your eyes and your smile, there are moments when I could almost wish that we were once more all in all to each other."

"And are we not so?" asked Ida, hastily.

"Yes and no: in heart no doubt we are: but, I repeat it, that boy has sadly encroached upon my privileges."

"Perhaps I have been to blame, Sydney; but still you will admit that while I have been engaged with our child, you have found, or created, other pursuits in which you have, to all appearance, at least, taken very considerable interest."

"What could I do? You abandoned me to my own resources."

"Do not mistake me, love," said Mrs. Elphinstone; "I am not speaking to blame you, I am only anxious to exonerate myself; and most certainly I should have been less independent in my own movements, had you not secured so charming a companion as Edith Malcolm."

"She is a sweet girl, that I am quite willing to admit," conceded Sydney, "but still she is not my wife."

Ida bit her lip.

"Surely," she said, "that circumstance, at least, can be no drawback to your pleasure in her society."

"Certainly not; but you do not appear to understand me."

"Be under no apprehension of the sort," replied Ida, with a forced laugh, "I am not so obtuse as you imagine. I think that I understand you perfectly. But really, Sydney, it has just occurred to me that, under existing circumstances, it might perhaps be as well if you were not for the future to engross quite so much of Edith's time and attention."

"What *can* you mean, Ida?"

"My meaning must be sufficiently obvious. As an engaged woman——"

"Nonsense! Is she not engaged to your own cousin?"

"So it would appear."

"Then it seems to me that 'existing circumstances' should rather tend to heighten than to decrease our intimacy."

"That may not, however, be the light in which Mr. Trevanion may regard it."

Elphinstone suddenly looked away from the glass before which he was somewhat fastidiously arranging his hair, and gazed steadfastly into the face of his wife:

"In that case," he said, with a gravity unusual to him, "it must have been unpleasant to yourself, or so strange an idea could never have entered your mind."

"*My mind!*" echoed Ida, with a constrained attempt at playfulness; "oh, that is quite a different affair; it is only *before* marriage that people are supposed to resent the intrusion of a third person between them; and I am now an old married woman, who must be swayed by facts rather than feelings."

Sydney was silent; there was something in the tone of his wife's voice which for the first time jarred upon his ear.

"Surely," he said at last, "you cannot imagine——"

"Imagine nothing," interposed Mrs. Elphinstone; "I have not a particle of romance in my composition."

"If I supposed that you could for a moment think me capable——"

"My dear Sydney, you are really fighting against a shadow! You quite terrify me by your dark looks. What have I said or done to anger you?"

"Nothing, Ida, nothing; I am wounded, but not angry: I could not be angry with you; but I confess——"

"Confess nothing, it would appear that we have been exchanging words and not ideas; a mental gladiatorship by no means desirable.—What are your plans for the day?"

"I have formed none."

"Edith is anxious to go to the National Gallery; there is still time enough before dinner; you will accompany her?"

"No."

"No!—are you serious?"

"Perfectly so."

"And what can be your reason?"

"I shall remain at home with you."

"My poor Sydney, you will be *ennuyé à mort*."

"Ida," said her husband, as he seated himself beside her, and took her hand in his, while large tears were swelling in his eyes, "there is something alike in your voice and manner which I endeavour in vain to comprehend. Since the hour in which you became my wife, the sole study of my life has been to secure your happiness. If I have failed, tell me at once the cause of that failure, that I may at least strive to repair it. Be frank; be sincere; I can support blame when I am conscious that it is merited; but let me at least understand the ground on which I stand."

"Have I uttered one word of blame?"

"You have not; but you have done worse, you have implied it. Have I deserved that you should treat me with this cold and bitter sarcasm? How am I to interpret either your manner or your words? Tell me plainly and at once in what I have offended you."

"Why should you suppose that I am offended?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone; "are you conscious of having given me cause of offence?"

"On my soul I am not."

"Then the question is a strange one."

"Ida! Ida! you will drive me mad," he exclaimed, starting from the sofa; "I have not deserved this."

"Will you explain your meaning, Sydney?" asked his wife, calmly.

"I will—would that I were unable to do so, but I cannot deceive myself—oh, Ida, that you, whom I have until this hour regarded as the most perfect of your sex—that *you* should indeed be guilty of such a weakness. But no, no; I wrong you—it cannot be—you are too high-minded, too pure in heart, to wrong either that innocent girl or myself by so foul a suspicion; only tell me that it is I who ought to blush for even venturing to glance at such a thought—reproach me, upbraid me, Ida, for so vile a distrust of your generous nature—for so frightful a belief, transient as it was—only say that you forgive me, though I cannot promise to forgive myself."

"Calm yourself, Sydney," said Mrs. Elphinstone, to whom the very intensity of her feelings gave an unnatural composure which added to the emotion of her husband; "I have no reproach to utter—what I foresaw has come to pass; you placed too great a reliance on a mere transitory passion, and you are beginning to discover your error. I have long seen this—long felt it—but I was strong enough to suffer in silence; I am so still; I shall remain so until I feel that my suffering can avail me nothing, and that it has become my duty to assert myself."

"You have forced this avowal from me; or rather, perhaps, I have been led to make it from a sense of delicacy towards my cousin, who will probably be susceptible on the subject of his future wife."

"And who would dare to malign that pure young girl, who is as innocent as an angel?" asked Elphinstone, passionately.

"Her purity and innocence may be considered questionable when it is known that she has alienated the affections of a husband from his wife," was the cold reply.

"Listen to me, Ida," exclaimed Sydney, with a vehemence that even startled his apparently impassive companion; "I could have borne all but this; *my* honour is at your mercy, trample on it if such is indeed your pleasure,

but I will brook no slur on *hers*; she is the child of my mother's chosen friend, the playmate of my boyhood, the hope and pride of a widowed parent's heart: earth contains not a more blameless, a more guileless spirit. If you have decided on the ruin of our domestic peace, I must submit; but your insane suspicions must extend no further, touch not a hair of her head by calumny; but, if you have indeed ceased to respect your own dignity, at least respect her innocence."

"Mr. Elphinstone," said his wife, indignantly, "you appear to forget that I am at your mercy."

"No, Ida, no; I forget nothing; and you may believe me when I declare that now you have learnt to look upon me as the base and unmanly ruffian that your words imply, I rejoice from my inmost heart that you have so opportunely secured partial and powerful friends, who are able to offer you a more fitting home than that which you accuse me of having dishonoured."

"Sydney!" exclaimed his wife, "you are cruel even to cowardice; you do not even shrink from threatening me with a second desertion. Forgetting that for you I became an alien from my home, you presume upon my helplessness to insult me. Did I not tell you when you combated my reason with your specious sophistries, that you would one day remember that you had sacrificed yourself to a woman older than yourself? Did I not warn you against the folly of believing that you would not one day feel this, and visit the penalty of your mistake upon my weakness? Do me justice in this at least."

"Ida, do not urge me too far; you have no right, you have no reason, to talk to me in such a strain as this."

"Enough! enough!" gasped out his wife; "you justify yourself by casting the blame on me, and I must submit. Be it so; there must be a victim—sacrifice *me*—as I before admitted, I am at your mercy. The world will be ready enough to exonerate you; there will be little sympathy and less pity for the woman of six-and-twenty who entrapped the affections of a boy."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Elphinstone, as he started from his seat, and rapidly paced the room; "all is indeed

over between us—we must part. How I have loved you, none have known; none can ever know; I would have clung to you through life and death. You were everything to me; the very air I breathed was not less essential to my happiness; but now—well, it is idle to repine; I am ready to pay the penalty of my mistake. You have withdrawn from me alike your confidence and your affection; and for both our sakes, it is better that we should part.”

Ida suddenly clasped her forehead with her spread hands, and fastened a gaze of agony upon her husband.

“Is it so?” she asked, in a whisper which fell upon the ear with all the shrillness of a suppressed scream; “is it really so? And could you indeed part from me so willingly? Sydney, Sydney, how have I deserved this?”

For a moment the whole frame of Elphinstone quivered, and he resolutely averted his eyes; but gradually the flush faded from his cheek, and the frown which had darkened his forehead passed away.

“No,” he murmured, tremulously, “no; you are right; it would be the rending asunder of body and soul; and yet even that were better than we should live on under the same roof, the one suspected and despised, and the other——”

“What of the other, Sydney? What of the other?” passionately demanded his wife, springing from the sofa, and throwing herself upon his bosom. “Oh, Sydney, what of the other?”

“I cannot—and must not dwell upon the subject,” was the agitated reply; “I have fallen from such a height into an abyss so frightful, that I want moral courage to probe my wretchedness to its actual depth.”

“Yet you did love me, Sydney.”

“Love you!” echoed her husband; “do you ask me if I loved you? Look into your own heart, and read there if I have merited that such a question should be put to me! It is because I loved you so entirely, so devotedly, that I am at this moment incapable not only of deciding how I ought to act, but even of so acting, if my reason pointed out the proper and becoming course.”

“And do you not love me still?”

“Ida, you have made me very, very wretched.”

"And I? am I not also most miserable? Did I not for your sake abandon father, mother, home—and brave the comments of an unsparing world? And now you threaten to desert me—me, and my worse than orphaned boy—Oh, Sydney, Sydney, can you, indeed, do this?"

"Tell me, Ida, only tell me that this is a frightful dream," said Elphinstone, as he stood encircled by her clinging arms; "I cannot, dare not, think that I have really lost my every hope of happiness. Tell me that all about me is a delusion, a cheat of my disordered fancy."

"Nothing is real, my own Sydney, nothing but my repentance. Do you not see my tears? do you not feel the throbbings of my heart? Shall I kneel to you for pardon?"

"Hush, Ida, hush!" said Elphinstone, hoarse with emotion, "I can bear no more. Let us strive to forget all that has just passed; let us remember only our days of happiness, those days when there was trust and confidence between us; let us think only of our child; and for his sake endeavour to bear with each others' faults, and to repair our own. I have erred—unconsciously, indeed—but still I have erred, or the woman in whom I had centred all my earthly hopes would not have accused me—the faults shall be repaired. I will state frankly to Lady Malcolm, that the constant intercourse between her daughter and myself has been a source of uneasiness to my wife, and that I consequently feel it to be my duty——"

"Sydney," exclaimed Ida, "do you wish to see me expire at your feet? would you make me a mark for the scorn and ridicule of an irritated mother? Oh, this is too, too much."

"In what other way can I convince you of my willingness to fulfil my share of the compact I have suggested?" demanded Elphinstone, with a dignity of manner which awed his excited and exhausted wife, who was sinking beneath the violence of long-suppressed and unconquerable emotion; "only name your wishes, and they shall be obeyed."

"Pity me—pardon me,"—broke in a low murmur from the lips of the wretched and self-tortured wife.

"I do both; and now listen, Ida." But he spoke to ears

which were no longer conscious of his voice—her overtaxed energies would endure no more—and she had fainted.

To raise her nerveless form, fold her frantically to his bosom, and implore her to forgive him, was the work of a moment to the unhappy Sydney; who, as he gazed upon her faultless face, now pale and cold as marble, and contemplated that “life in death” which is so fearful a counterfeit of actual dissolution, felt as though he were in very fact the murderer that he called himself.

Vainly did he press his fevered lips upon her cheek and brow, his caress remained without response; equally vain were his wild entreaties that she would look at him—speak to him. The closed eye and rigid mouth remained still—the very pulses of her heart had ceased to beat—and at length, fairly maddened by his fear and his remorse, the poor young man sank down beside her, and buried his face amid the folds of her dress, as still and motionless as the slight form against which he leant.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RECONCILIATION.

AN hour passed away, yet Elphinstone neither spoke nor moved; but, unlike that of his wife, who lay in a state of utter unconsciousness, his period of inaction was far from being one of rest.

An agony of spirit, too intense for physical demonstration, crushed him to the very earth. His bodily energies were dormant, but his mental powers were painfully, bitterly active.

Like one in a hideous dream, he looked back upon the illusions of the past only to be scourged once more into suffering by the realities of the present; and what did that present now offer to his contemplation?

In the severity of his great and absorbing happiness, in the joy of loving, and feeling that he was beloved, he had wilfully put from him all the uncertainties of the future; like the unwary traveller who, engrossed by the glorious landscape around him, forgets the sure progress of time, and

finds himself suddenly benighted, without refuge or shelter, he had sauntered on in the pleasant path which spread itself before him, without taking one precaution against the hour when it might become tangled and hard to tread; and thus he found himself unable to cope with the difficulties by which he was surrounded.

Had he been less devoted to his wife, all would have been comparatively easy, as, in the event of a reconciliation, he might have consoled himself under the miserable conviction of her weakness by once more courting the smiles of a world ever ready to bestow them upon the young and gifted who can bring appropriate incense to its shrine; or even, were this reconciliation impossible, it would still have been in his power to commence a new career, trammelled indeed by bitter memories, but still open to a sanguine and energetic nature. Now, however, it was far otherwise, for, young as he was, Sydney Elphinstone had staked his all of happiness on his love for Ida, and he loved her still, even in this hour of agony, when he could not conceal from himself that she had forfeited a portion of his respect. He probed his heart unshrinkingly, but no accusing voice came from its depths—not a thought, not a wish, had wandered from her; and the blow fell with corresponding weight.

What was to be the end? what hope, what trust, could he ever again rest upon her affection after she had thus so cruelly misjudged him? He felt that henceforward he should be perpetually standing on the brink of a precipice, down which he might be hurled at any moment, without having himself made one onward step. It was a harrowing reflection: he was as yet only on the threshold of manhood; he had barely entered his twenty-second year; and already he had experienced one of the most bitter trials of life.

Hot tears flooded his heart, and stagnated there—his burning eyeballs were dry. He had become an object of suspicion to the woman whom he would himself have trusted even to the death. True, she had evidently repented her ungenerous want of confidence, while it was equally certain that she still loved him—there was no mistaking the cry of anguish with which she had thrown herself upon his bosom; but what, to such a nature as his, was love without

faith? Nothing; less than nothing: a perpetual mockery, which must wear away not only her existence, but his own also.

There could be no return of the halcyon days, when heart met heart without misgiving; henceforward, every word and action must be weighed; and a never-ceasing restraint, like a mortal coat of mail, never to be put off, must exist between them.

Not once, during his long and painful vigil, had it occurred to Elphinstone to summon assistance. The dead silence which had succeeded to the storm of passion appeared so natural a consequence of the previous excitement, that he continued helplessly engrossed by his own miserable thoughts, until a deep sigh from Ida recalled him to a sense of her situation. Slowly, then, and with a sigh whose intensity formed a fitting echo to her own, he rose from his knees, and pillowing her head upon his shoulder, deluged her pale face with an essence which he found upon her table.

His hand shook, and his lip quivered as he looked upon her, so lovely and so helpless in her unconsciousness; and when, as he almost frantically pressed a kiss upon her forehead, she at length opened her eyes with a wild and inquiring expression, a convulsive sob, which he could not repress, replied to the appeal.

"Ha!" murmured Ida, as she swept her hand across her brow; "now I remember all—all—but you will not abandon me, Sydney? you will not make our child fatherless?"

"Be calm, Ida, be calm," he answered, in a voice so changed that it sounded strange even to his own ears; "have we not already decided that we must endeavour to forget the past? Let us fulfil the pledge. I have lived too long for myself; for the past I will substitute the future. There are duties, hitherto neglected, which henceforth shall be performed: indulgences which henceforth shall be abandoned; you shall no longer have further cause of complaint against me."

"Sydney, what mean you?"

"I will no longer be a mere man of pleasure, forgetting all my home-happiness, the responsibilities which have

devolved upon me. I will at last be strong and earnest; I have work before me—it shall be accomplished; hitherto, in the egotism of a false and unworthy pride, I have shrunk from suing for the help of others to aid me on my onward path; now I will shrink no longer; but boldly put from me the weak shame of soliciting what I cannot command. My day of sloth is at an end, and that of labour shall commence in earnest. When you know that I am toiling for you and for our boy, you will learn to trust me.”

“Oh, speak less coldly—I cannot bear it.”

“Poor girl!” said Elphinstone; “we must both strive to bear our burthen. I am not cold, but I have aged years within the last two hours, and I must seek to profit by the experience so dearly bought. Rouse yourself, Ida; the realities of life have come upon us—suddenly and harshly, it is true—but they have come, and we must face them bravely. We have dreamt a glorious dream, but let us not embitter the awakening by useless repinings for the past.”

“And is this all? Have you, indeed, cast me from your heart for ever?”

“No, Ida, no; while it beats it must beat for you. But we can no longer deceive ourselves; a gulf has yawned between us in which the dearest of our mutual illusions have gone down—your faith in me—my trust in your confiding affection. It is a sad truth, but we cannot conceal it from ourselves; let us, therefore, rather mourn over it together: it will be another bond of sympathy between us.”

“Sydney, my heart is breaking!” gasped his wife.

“Rest it upon mine,” was the reply, as he drew her closer to him, and folded her in his arms. “We can still love each other, Ida—let that be our consolation.”

“But if I solemnly vow never again to doubt you——”

“Strive, for both our sakes, to place what trust in me you can, but make no vow—it would be at once idle and impotent.”

Mrs. Elphinstone sank back upon the sofa convulsed with agony. She no longer recognised her husband: the idolising lover had been transformed, as if by some occult magic, into the stern and moralising Mentor: his heart was still hers, but his reason had condemned her.

All around her was a blank waste—she felt as if she could have shrieked out in her anguish, while she had not even power to stay the large cold tears which were chasing each other down her cheeks.

Sydney, meanwhile, sat with his head buried in his hands—he was still dizzy from the effects of his sudden wretchedness; and thus they both remained for a time silent and motionless.

Suddenly Ida arose from her recumbent position, and sprang to the bell.

“Bring me my child,” she said to the servant who obeyed the summons; and in an instant he was in her arms.

“Sydney,” she murmured, as she sank on her knees before him, and held towards him the unconscious infant, laughing, and struggling to reach its father; “pardon me, and trust me for his sake.”

Elphinstone looked up; a wild burst of grief shook him as with an ague fit; he strove to speak, but his words were inaudible; yet Ida was satisfied; the infant was clinging to his bosom; her own head rested upon his knee; and she felt his hot tears rain down upon her hair. He did not attempt to raise her from the ground; he was evidently unconscious of the lowly posture in which she had sued for forgiveness; his moral strength was spent; that last agonizing cry came from the mother of his child, and his heart had melted within him.

How could he doubt her at that moment, when the soft little hand of his firstborn was pressed against his cheek? He did not; he was incapable of following up the train of thought by which he had just been oppressed; his sense of wrong had spent itself; he could only yearn for peace, and rest.

“My own best love!” he at length faltered out; “come to my heart, Ida; let me hold you there together.”

With a wild gasp his wife flung herself upon his neck; and both believed as they clung together in that close embrace that they were once more happy beyond the reach of fate. Alas! that those clinging arms should ever relax—that the blessed oblivion of that moment should ever

yield to the memories of the past, and the threatenings of the future! The eastern traveller, after thirsting and panting in the desert, indulges in the same fallacy, as he reaches the green oasis, casts himself down under the sheltering trees, and laves his parched throat with the sparkling water: he forgets the weary waste of sand behind him; he casts no anxious glance over the arid wilderness before him; the present is for the moment all in all; but still the fact remains unchanged, that on the track which he had passed he has left time, and strength, and energy; and on that which he has still to pursue, the same, and perhaps greater perils, await him.

Yet both body and mind may well seek rest in these halting-places of life and travel, for without them, few could survive the journey.

And there were peace and love once more in that modest cottage; fond endearments, and gentle words, and looks more eloquent than words; the leafy boughs still afforded their grateful shade, the limpid water still touched their lips refreshingly, the grass was green beneath their feet, the heavens blue above their heads—and the desert lay afar off in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TEMPTER.

ON the following morning, true to the resolve which he had made to himself, Elphinstone proceeded early to the Temple; where, in default of any more active professional occupation, he passed several hours in close and earnest study, and resolutely flung from him the languor consequent upon the excitement which he had undergone on the previous day.

Occasionally, sad thoughts, and even forebodings, forced themselves upon him, but suffering had made him strong, and he would not yield to that yearning for mental repose which would have rendered him unable to pursue his task.

With Ida, however, it was far otherwise. Her husband had for months past been constantly at home, and she had become so habituated to his presence that, had

she even been free from every other cause of suffering, her solitude would of itself have been irksome to her. As it was, therefore, it became, after a time, almost unendurable.

She had whiled away the early hours of the morning with her infant, but at length he slept; and she had no resource save her own thoughts, when, after having seated herself at the instrument, and discovered that her irritated nerves could not support the sound of music; turned to her easel, and found that her unsteady fingers failed in their accustomed skill; and thrown aside a book over which her eyes wandered mechanically without taking in its sense, she at last threw herself hopelessly into a chair, and abandoned all further attempt at occupation.

For awhile she could not collect her ideas; all seemed vague and dream-like: her husband's sudden assumption of authority; her own submission; all appeared unnatural and impossible; but gradually the mental mist was swept away, and she recalled with a distinctness that made her pulses throb, and her brow burn with emotion, every look and word which had passed between them.

Silently she sat with clasped hands so tightly clenched together, that the tips of her fingers were bloodless from the pressure. The first question that she had put to her own heart had been—How could I doubt him? How had he deserved that I should so wrong his frank and noble nature? And, under this first impulse, bitterly did she condemn herself; but as time wore on, the busy fiend for whom she had so long made a home within her bosom, began once more to struggle into life; her jealousy had been crushed by fear, not annihilated by conviction.

She remembered that Sydney had upbraided her for a suspicion which he had denounced as impure and unwomanly, and that he had even volunteered to forego the society of Lady Malcolm and her daughter; but she also recalled the fact to mind that, while blaming her, he had been enthusiastic in his praise of Edith; and that he had not once striven to exculpate himself: that he had been indignant, but not explanatory; loud in deprecation of her own conduct, but silent with regard to his own personal feelings.

Was this fair? was this manly? were her next mental queries; and the inward demon murmured—no—you were borne down by words; you were overwhelmed but not convinced; and yet you were weak enough to yield to mere idle declamation—the declamation of a boy, proud in his sense of power, and wielding his pigmy bow with as much importance as though he were, like Sagittarius, about to bring down a constellation at every shot, when, in point of fact, he was only shooting into the void. Were you required to make your own heart, which he had already wounded, a target for his weapon? It would have been time enough to have played the submissive wife when he had justified himself in your eyes—but what proof had you?—what proof did he offer to you that you had wronged him? None—he reproached and threatened, while you wept and sued; and what have you gained? Conviction? Peace of mind?—And with a shuddering sigh, Ida answered—“neither—I am *not* convinced—I am *not* at peace.”

And still her child slept on!

“Delightful!” exclaimed a cheerful voice, as the drawing-room door opened, and the full-plumed bonnet and searching eyes of Mrs. Darnell appeared, glancing and fluttering their way towards Ida: “Mrs. Elphinstone not only at home, but also alone! How pleased I am that I made my first visit here. The doctor told me that I should weary you with my company if I called too often; but men understand these matters so badly, that I was determined to persist. Only say that you are glad to see me.”

“I am *very* glad to see you,” said her hostess, extending her hand, and, by a violent effort, arousing herself from her abstraction, “and duly appreciate your kindness in wasting your time upon a recluse, when you must have so many more agreeable engagements.”

“Recluse indeed, my dear young lady; but why should it be so? with your beauty and your talents, you could always command society.”

“I care little now for what is called the world,” was the reply, “I have tried it, and found it alike hollow and heartless.”

“We have all done that in our turn,” said the visitor, with

as much sententiousness as she could contrive to throw into her tone and manner; "but we can at least pay it back in its own currency. The world amuses me; it has amused me all my life; and I am contented to make use of it in its own way."

"You are a practical philosopher," said Ida, with a smile.

"Now, that is so like one of the doctor's remarks!" exclaimed the voluble little lady, settling herself upon the chair. "He is always telling me that I am this, that, or the other, of which I have not the most remote idea myself."

"In your modesty," said Ida, with a gleam of her old humour; "you are then, probably, like Molière's gentleman, who had talked prose all his life without being aware of it."

"Very likely; at all events, I know that it is very pleasant to talk with you—particularly when you are alone—for I have taken an immense fancy to you, and am glad to have you for once all to myself."

"I cannot but feel greatly flattered," replied her hostess; "and only regret that I shall prove a sorry companion to-day, as I am suffering severely from nervous headache."

"A nasty complaint," said Mrs. Darnell; "a very nasty complaint. Do let me be professional, and recommend camphor julep; or, better still, fresh air and exercise. You are too much in the house, Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Perhaps I am; but I am ashamed to confess that I have not courage to walk alone."

"Of course not; it would be highly incorrect for you to do so; but there is your husband, who must only be too delighted to show himself with a beautiful woman upon his arm. All men like it; it flatters their vanity."

"Mr. Elphinstone is engaged at the Temple."

"Not always: I have frequently seen him walking with Miss Malcolm."

Ida's cheek flushed slightly, but she controlled herself. "He was an idle man at that time," she said, quietly; "but now he is about to devote himself to his profession."

"All very proper, no doubt. I have not a word to say

on the subject ; it is only a pity you did not profit by his period of idleness to lay in a stock of health."

"I was a nurse all that time, and could not leave my boy."

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the little woman, demurely ; "let me hope that you will not fall into the same error as many young mothers, and by devoting yourself too much to your infant, allow your husband to perceive that he can do without you : it is a lesson that men soon learn, and never forget. At this very moment I could really find it in my heart to be seriously angry with you, for not going at least a short distance to meet Mr. Elphinstone, instead of allowing Miss Malcolm to do so."

"What *can* you mean, my dear Mrs. Darnell?"

"Mean!" echoed the lady ; "what can I mean, but that I passed them on the road as I came here ; and that I consider that I am only doing my duty by proving to you that you should be more cautious."

"I am sure you are very kind"—gasped Ida.

"I am sure that I wish to be so," was the ready reply ; "and you young creatures all require the assistance of older and wiser heads than your own. 'Experience makes fools wise,' says the proverb ; and you must have time before you can gain experience."

"It appears to me, nevertheless, that some experience is forced upon us very rapidly."

"No doubt of it, but is it worth much ? Does it make you happier or better?"

"Neither, I fear."

"Of course not ; that is quite a different sort of thing. The experience that I mean——"

Mrs. Darnell paused ; if she really did know what she meant, she was certainly unable to express it ; and after an instant's silence she resumed abruptly :

"Now, as an example of what I want you to understand—suppose, for instance, you had occasionally waived your duties as a mother to fulfil those of a wife, do you not see at once that you would have been more necessary to your husband, and not have thrown him so constantly into the society of that pretty girl, Miss Malcolm ? Very dangerous, very

dangerous indeed, my dear lady ; for men will be men ; and although you are so much handsomer than your young friend, you ought to remember that she is not his wife, and that there is always a charm in novelty."

"She is not *my* friend," said Ida, bitterly ; "Lady Malcolm and Mr. Elphinstone's mother were greatly attached ; and as a natural consequence——"

"Yes, yes ; I perfectly comprehend," said the visitor, with a sagacious nod ; "the old family affection has created a sort of cousinship, which is all very well when not carried too far ; but really I have seen so much trouble brought about by sentimental attachments of that kind, that I feel it more than ever my duty to warn you to be upon your guard. Mr. Elphinstone is a charming young man, but still he is *very* young, and cannot be expected to calculate the consequences of any little indiscretion into which he may be led by a warm heart and high spirits. I have, as I said before, taken a great fancy to you, and therefore I venture to be frank ; they say, you know, that 'lookers on see most of the game.'"

"And what have you seen?" asked Ida, struggling to retain her composure.

"Little as yet, very little, I confess," was the unsatisfactory reply ; "but then you must remember that I have only recently made your acquaintance."

"But something you must have seen," persevered Mrs. Elphinstone, "or you would not have considered it necessary to urge me to greater prudence."

"These affairs require delicate handling," said Mrs. Darnell, with a complacency which betrayed her perfect confidence in her own skill and tact ; "a look or a word may mean so much or so little ; and as my only aim is to tranquillise your mind, and to impress upon you your responsibilities as a wife, I cannot of course wish to make you see with my eyes, or understand with my understanding. All that I shall venture to say therefore, is this—do not encourage the intimacy between your husband and Miss Malcolm too far"

Had her visitor exhibited an equal amount of low breeding and want of charity upon any other subject, how would

the high-minded Ida have loathed and despised her ! How soon would she have silenced the busy tongue which sported so glibly with the holiest and most sacred feelings of others ! How indignantly would she have rejected the companionship of a vulgar gossip, whose prying eyes saw deep into the darkest corners of a quiet home, and peopled the void with phantoms !

Now, however, it was far otherwise, and Mrs. Darnell was not more convinced of the kindness and sagacity of her own proceedings than was her unhappy listener.

"You may be right," she said, after a moment's silence ; "it may have been imprudent on my part to permit so close an intimacy between the two families, but it is only just to Mr. Elphinstone to tell you, that he voluntarily offered to put an end to it, should such be my wish."

"Poor thing !" almost whispered her companion, as an expression of very sincere regret settled upon her usually joyous face ; "has it already come to that ? I am sorry to hear it—very sorry—for that was precisely what I was anxious to prevent. I did hope to open your eyes before your husband could suspect that he had given you one uneasy thought. All might have been so easily arranged in some way or other ; it is a sad disappointment to me to find that the subject has been broached between you."

"You cannot regret it more than I do," said Ida, gloomily ; "I am sorry to have been so rash, but in an unguarded moment——"

"I can quite understand you, quite ; but it is to be deplored that you were so far excited as to lose your self-command ; for I know well by experience how these things end : let the wife be as perfect as she may, she must give way at last, so that, by attempting to protect and justify herself she only loses ground."

"Which she may perhaps never regain," murmured Mrs. Elphinstone, rather speaking to herself than addressing her companion.

"A very rational remark, my dear young lady," said Mrs. Darnell, approvingly ; "and one which gives me a great respect for your understanding ; my late grandmother, who was a very superior woman, never took leave of a bride

without saying to her, 'You will be the idol of a month, but only a wife for the rest of your days; remember this; and, above all else, beware of the first quarrel—quarrel as much as you please afterwards, but beware of the first time, for rest assured, that although both may forgive neither will forget.' She gave the same warning to scores of young women in her time; and I am really very, very sorry that I was not able to do the same kind office for you before it was too late."

Ida made no reply; a weight had fallen upon her heart, and rested there like an incubus.

"However," resumed the pertinacious visitor who had not penetration to discover that she had stretched her listener upon a moral rack which strained and tore every fibre of her spirit, "we will hope better things for you. Mr. Elphinstone is, as I before remarked, so very young, and you are so very beautiful, that no doubt all will come right in time. Only, I entreat of you, take my advice; profit by his offer, and get rid of that very dangerous young lady.

„I have had an unpleasant task to perform, but the extraordinary interest which I feel for you rendered it a duty, according to my ideas of Christian charity and sisterly love. It would have been better certainly if Lady Malcolm had spared me so ungracious an office, as she most decidedly would have done had she displayed proper prudence; but I care little for my own feelings when I can relieve those of others.

"Look upon me, therefore, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, as a warm and sincere friend; confide in me, and make use of me without ceremony or scruple, whenever I can be of service to you; for, as the doctor truly says, I am never so happy as when I am mixed up with the troubles and trials of others. And now that I flatter myself I have comforted and soothed you, I will leave you to reflect upon our conversation. I need not say that I will soon see you again."

There was a flutter of gauze and feathers, a rustling of silk and velvet, a clasping of hands, an exchange of courteous words, and Mrs. Darnell disappeared. She paused for a

moment in the hall to desire the maid, who attended her to the door, to be very, very careful of her poor mistress; and then the sound of her carriage-wheels died away in the distance; and still Ida stood erect and rigid on the spot where they had parted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STORM CLOUD.

DESPITE the fond embrace with which he had parted from his wife, Elphinstone could not conceal from himself, as he at length closed his books and left the Temple, that his home had ceased to be to him the haven of peace and love which it had once been.

All his most cherished associations had suddenly been shivered about him and it was in vain that he strove to restore the fragments into a perfect whole: the shock was still too recent: the blow had been at once too heavy and too abrupt.

His sense of delicacy revolted at the recollection that Ida, who had even until the previous day been to him an object of worship, should suddenly have become a suppliant for pity and for pardon; and that the confidence which he had placed in her affection should have been so cruelly requited; his love for her continued unimpaired, but with it came a new and unwelcome feeling, that robbed it of half its charm.

Unconsciously his step grew languid, and he lingered on his way as he had never hitherto done after an absence of so many hours from his beautiful and gifted wife. What security had he that, even in that comparatively short space of time, she might not have encouraged new doubts, as wild and baseless as those which had already caused him so much misery?

The Malcolms, too—how could he ever again meet them as he had hitherto done, conscious that every look and word must be weighed and measured, and even then, perhaps, adduced as evidence against him?

Poor Sydney! with his impulsive temperament and frank-

heartedness, he keenly felt how difficult a task lay before him; and, had he not been restrained by his promise to Ida, he would at once have confided to Lady Malcolm the embarrassing nature of his position, and left it to her more matured judgment to discover some mode of escape for both parties; but Ida had shrunk from exposing her weakness to the mother of Edith, and he resolved to respect her dignity with as much jealousy as herself. Thus he had no resource save in his own moral courage, and bitter was the reflection that it should be first called into action to secure the tranquillity of his own hearth.

Such were the musings of the young husband as he slowly proceeded on his homeward path, a path which, for the first time, he felt to be irksome; nor could he conceal from himself, that it was actually a relief to him when he encountered Lady Malcolm and her daughter, who were taking their accustomed walk, and to whom he felt compelled to offer his protection. The meeting, even trammelled as it was by a consciousness of the annoyance which Ida would feel could she be aware of the accident, was of service to him, as it served to direct his thoughts from his own trials, and to give them another direction.

Soothed by the calm good sense of his mother's friend, and enlivened by the gentle gaiety of her daughter, the moments passed swiftly and pleasantly; nor was it until he parted with the ladies at their own gate, that he was startled by the recollection that there no longer remained the time necessary for the walk which he had proposed to his wife as he left her, and for which she had promised to prepare herself against his return. Never before had he failed in any appointment involving her gratification, and at what a moment and in what a manner had he done so now! He actually trembled with eagerness as he reached his own door, and anticipated the merited reproach with which she would probably receive him on his return.

Herein, however, he instantly discovered that he had deceived himself. As he entered the room, Mrs. Elphinstone was seated at the piano, from which she instantly rose with a smile to greet him.

"Will you forgive me, my love," he asked, "for not

having fulfilled my promise to return at an earlier hour than this? I am really quite distressed to be so late, but I have been detained."

"Are you late?" asked Ida in her turn, affecting to consult the little French timepiece; "oh, no; we shall not dine for an hour yet, so that you have more time than you will require for your toilette."

"But the walk upon which we had decided?"

"Ah, true," she replied, in the same accent of calm indifference in which she had first spoken; "I remember now, that we did talk of a country ramble; but, as you see, I had forgotten it, and had consequently made no preparation."

Sydney was deeply hurt, and his countenance betrayed it; but Mrs. Elphinstone was carefully collecting her music, and did not, or would not, seem to remark his annoyance.

"Your forgetfulness cannot, however, exonerate me—" he commenced, struggling to assume as much composure as herself.

"Oh, not a word more, my dear Sydney," she interposed, "upon so unimportant a subject. I feel convinced that you were more usefully occupied; and, although I cannot boast of having passed my time as profitably as yourself, I have at least spent it very pleasantly."

"Are you, then, becoming so much enamoured of solitude, Ida?"

"By no means," was the quick rejoinder; "nor have I been solitary; on the contrary, Mrs. Darnell paid me a very long, and very kind visit, for which I feel greatly indebted to her."

"Mrs. Darnell!" echoed Elphinstone, emphatically. "It is impossible that you could derive any pleasure from the society of that trifling, mindless woman."

"You are quite in error, I assure you, Sydney, I have a decided *engouement* for Mrs. Darnell; and, more than that, I have also a great respect for her. She is so frank and warm-hearted, and, moreover, possessed of such admirable judgment, that I consider her friendship to be a valuable acquisition to one so inexperienced in the duties and privileges of a wife as myself."

"Ida, I had no idea that you could be so sarcastic

"I intended no sarcasm. I have simply expressed my conviction of her character," said his wife, firmly; "and surely you must be happy to find that such a friend is willing to enliven the hours rendered dreary by your absence."

"I should, indeed, be so," rejoined Elphinstone, "could enter into your feelings towards her; but the expression of such an opinion from *you* has, I confess, astonished me not a little."

"You perhaps think her too old to be agreeable," remarked Ida, drily.

"Too old?" echoed Sydney. "You do me injustice. It depends on women themselves to be agreeable at any age. They have it in their power to be charming at every season, like the roses of the Philippine Islands, which are white at sunrise, pink at noon, and crimson at twilight; changeful it may be, but charming in every change."

"Who is sarcastic now?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone.

"Certainly not I," laughed her husband; "and I think you must at least be compelled to admit that I have treated your new friend very poetically."

"But you dislike her?"

"I confess that I do not admire her general deportment, and that I have rather a mean opinion of her understanding."

"You do her injustice," said Ida, with a flashing eye; "she is a shrewd and clear-sighted woman, who only requires to be known in order to be appreciated."

"Now, how on earth, my dear girl," asked Sydney, "have you been able to make so extraordinary a discovery? what can Mrs. Darnell have said or done to establish her fussy little self so firmly in your affections?"

"She has taken a sincere interest in me, and is anxious to contribute to my happiness."

"She is too kind," replied Elphinstone, in a grieved accent: "but I trust that your happiness does not depend on her very supererogatory aid and support. You already possessed a friend equally anxious to render you every service in her power, and one who would, I should have thought, have been infinitely more congenial to so refined a nature as your own, in Lady Malcolm."

"Comparisons are invidious, my dear Sydney."

"Neither do I seek to institute a comparison between two women who are the antipodes of each other;" was the impatient rejoinder; "and you must forgive me if I frankly confess at once that to me the vulgar-minded wife of Dr. Darnell is positively insufferable."

"What can you have to fear from my friendship with the poor lady, who has so unconsciously inspired your dislike?"

"Fear! nothing assuredly for myself; but I feel disappointed that you should find pleasure in the society of a woman to whom I am satisfied that you would not have accorded a second glance before you became my wife."

"Perhaps not," said Ida, with an ambiguous smile; "for, at that period, although I lived in what is emphatically called 'the world,' I had never looked below its surface, and was consequently only one of the bubbles that floated down the tide, without comprehending what lay beneath; now, however, when I have to struggle against the current, I must learn to turn my gaze from the sunshine that gleams above, to the impediments which may possibly impede my progress—the rocks and shoals that are hidden in the depths of the stream."

"And has such a struggle really commenced for you, Ida?"

"Certainly, my dear Sydney. Am I not a wife and a mother? Are not our prospects uncertain? Our resources rapidly diminishing?"

"True," said Elphinstone, gloomily; "true; your trials have indeed commenced; and if you conceive that they can be lessened by other sympathy than my own, you have every right to try the experiment."

Ida made no reply, but after having with great apparent care smoothed the dark bands of hair which fell low upon her cheeks, before the mirror, she turned towards the book-case, and with the same affectation of fastidiousness selected a volume, with which she established herself upon the sofa, apparently forgetful of her husband's presence.

Elphinstone was bewildered, and as he paced slowly to and fro, he asked himself in vain what could be the

meaning of his wife's extraordinary manner. Suddenly he stopped immediately in front of her, and gazed inquiringly into her face, but she read on calmly, with a smile playing about her lips, as though pleasantly engrossed by the book in which she was occupied.

At this moment the servant announced dinner.

"Already!" exclaimed Sydney; "and I have not even changed my dress. Will you excuse me for five minutes, Ida?"

"For any time you please; there is no hurry in the world;" replied his wife, without raising her eyes from the volume.

After another long look, which remained unnoticed like the last, Elphinstone hurriedly left the room. As he did so, the book fell from his wife's hand to the floor, her eyes were strained in the direction where he had disappeared, and her trembling lips became livid. It was evident that she struggled fiercely to control the violence of the emotion which shook her whole frame to agony; but she did control it; not a tear moistened the quivering eyelids, not a sigh escaped the overcharged breast; all was still, strong endurance; the shaft hurled by the idle hand of Mrs. Darnell had struck home, and the iron which rankled in the wound was crushed back as resolutely as the Spartan boy crushed back the living death that he carried in his bosom.

Already! while the kiss of reconciliation was yet warm upon her lips—while the words of promise and of hope were still sounding in her ears.—Already had Sydney again sought the society of the woman whom she feared and hated; and forgotten his pledge to her. A low bitter laugh escaped her once, and once only; nor did she stir a limb until aroused by the hasty step of her husband as he crossed the hall. Then she stooped, picked up the volume that lay at her feet, and, resuming the attitude in which he had left her, was once more, to all appearance, absorbed as before.

"Are you ready, Ida?" asked Elphinstone, as he paused at the door.

"Quite;" she replied, rising with alacrity and moving towards him.

The young man's heart throbbed painfully. Could he have mistaken her? Had the book which she had persisted so pertinaciously in reading, really so much interested her that it had caused her to overlook his want of punctuality, and even rendered her for the moment independent of his society? It must be so; and he had been doing battle with a shadow.

Strong in this conviction, she had no sooner reached his side than he took her hand, but it was instantly withdrawn.

"What can this mean?" he asked; "have I again offended you, Ida?"

"Oh, no;" was the reply, as by a violent effort she recovered her self-possession; "why should you suppose so?"

"Because you would not suffer me to take your hand."

"It is unnecessary," she said quietly; "the distance is not great."

"True," acquiesced Elphinstone as he followed her to the dining-room, thankful that the presence of the servant must for a time at least avert the storm which he saw was once more gathering around him.

The dinner passed almost in silence, and as the wondering attendant quietly performed her duties, Sydney felt the very air oppressive, so heavily did the singular demeanour of his wife weigh upon his spirit; nor was it until they were again alone that he could rally sufficiently to make any attempt at conversation; while even then the calm pale face of Ida actually awed him.

"You appear to have been singularly interested in your book to-day," he said at length. "May I inquire what it was?"

"I really do not recollect," was the reply; "it lies yonder; perhaps you may like to read it."

"Not at present, I would rather converse with you."

"I shall be but a poor companion. My head aches horribly."

"I feared as much," said Elphinstone eagerly, endeavouring to delude himself into the belief that he had now found the true solution of the enigma; "I felt sure that something was wrong. You are very pale, love; shall I send for Dr. Darnell?"

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone; "I will apply a better remedy," and laying her hand on the bell, she desired the servant by whom it was answered, to beg Lady Malcolm and her daughter to do her the favour to take their coffee with herself and Mr. Elphinstone.

"My dear Ida," said her husband, as the attendant withdrew, "would not a perfectly quiet evening have been more beneficial in your present state than even the society of your friends?"

"Perhaps so, as regards myself," was the cold reply; "but I am not selfish enough to sacrifice your gratification to my own—and it will, I should imagine, be pleasant to both Miss Malcolm and yourself to talk over your morning's walk. They will no doubt be here in a few minutes, and meanwhile I will go and ascertain if Hubert is asleep."

As she ceased speaking, she rose and left the room, while her husband, who instantly comprehended the whole extent of the new difficulty in which he had so innocently involved himself, remained motionless with surprise and mortification.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ESTRANGEMENT.

FROM the evening recorded in the last chapter no allusion was ever again made by Mrs. Elphinstone to her husband's implied admiration of Miss Malcolm, but he too well comprehended the nature of his wife to imagine for an instant that she any longer placed the slightest confidence in his affection; and while he could have taken her to his heart, and wept over her pale cheek, and the rapid attenuation of her still graceful, but now fearfully fragile form, and poured forth all the agony of his soul at her mistrust, he shrank from the slightest demonstration, lest the appeal which he would fain have made to her reason should only lead to a renewal of the bitter scenes through which they had already passed.

And thus they lived on: Sydney smothering his better feelings, and sacrificing his innate sense of dignity, to that morbid love of ease which formed so prominent a feature in his generous but weak nature; and Ida gnawing away her

own heart in silence, conscious that when the moment of conviction came, the lava-flood of her indignation must carry ruin with it.

Elphinstone chafed under an injustice as baseless as it was unworthy; while his wife, misled by her own wretched suspicions, and confirmed in her error by the inane consolation and advice of a mindless and ill-judging acquaintance, never for an instant suffered herself to doubt that she had become the victim of his inconstancy.

Thus, in order to escape from a thralldom which was hateful to him, the young husband, who at the commencement of his married life had looked upon his chambers in the Temple as exile, because they involved an occasional and brief separation from the object of his idolatry, soon learned to feel that his most genial home was there—there, where no cold but ever-watchful eye noted his every movement; where no quick but apparently careless ear drank in his every word; and where no diseased and distorted imagination converted even his most inconsequent actions into matters of moment, pregnant with inquiry and meaning.

The ready smile and unquestioning docility of his wife wounded him to the quick, for they were no longer the assurances of affection and devotedness; the smile was hollow, and the docility overacted and unnatural; there was no longer any communion of spirit between them; Ida was a mere human automaton, answering to every spring at his pleasure, but originating no movement of her own.

To his anxious inquiries regarding her health he always received the same stereotyped reply—she was quite well—quite—could not desire to be better; to his attentions she resigned herself passively, as though this resignation were a part of her wifely duty. Nor did she, on her side, neglect to exhibit towards Sydney all those minor courtesies which are so dear and grateful to the heart when they are the spontaneous growth of mutual affection: but this was rather from an impulse of high breeding than from a genuine desire to increase his happiness: and Elphinstone was not slow to see and feel the painful truth.

There was no pleading now for another hour when her

husband, immediately after breakfast, day by day lingered for a moment in the hall to caress his boy ere he caught up his hat and gloves, and with a hasty kiss upon her brow, hurried off to town; no inquiry as to the probable hour of his return; nothing but a calm and unquestioning submission to his will, an apparent indifference to his movements, which had gradually built up a wall of ice between them, that sent its bitter chill to the hearts of both.

Scarcely, however, had Sydney disappeared, and her child been placed in her arms, than *Ida* passionately pressed her lips upon the rosy little cheek still flushed from the pressure of her husband's kiss; while hot tears, long and painfully suppressed, streamed down her face, and fell into her bosom. She had ceased to trust, but she still loved him with the whole vehemence of her ungoverned nature.

Poor *Ida*! with all the elements of happiness within her reach, she was hopelessly, irremediably wretched. Her capricious inconsistencies, her wayward fits of temper, had seriously alienated the affection of *Lady Malcolm*, who had, moreover, resolutely refused to expose her daughter to a constant companionship with *Mrs. Darnell*, to whose mind and manners she alike objected; nor had she failed to impress upon *Ida* the inexpediency of encouraging her visits. This advice was, however, at once rejected, as the ill-fated woman instantly attributed to her right-minded and well-judging friend a motive totally foreign to the real one, and felt a bitter pleasure in disregarding her advice.

Still for *Sydney's* sake, *Lady Malcolm* resolutely supported the occasional annoyances to which she was exposed through the waywardness of his wife; nor was it long ere she discovered that *Mrs. Elphinstone* had some hidden sorrow, and then the warm stream of her woman-heart welled up, and she forgot her own feelings in her anxious endeavour to soothe those of *Ida*.

Vain, however, was the attempt; her inferences were disdainfully denied; how, she was asked, could the wife of *Sydney Elphinstone*—the wife who had abandoned everything for his sake, and to whom his affection was all in all—be otherwise than happy, most happy?

"Were you indeed aware that he had ceased to love me," she pursued with a kindling eye, "you might suspect that I was the victim of a hidden grief; but now——"

"You misconceive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," replied her companion mildly, "I have had so sad an experience of the world, that I too well know how possible it is to have a sorrow totally unconnected with home and home-affections. Did I dare to do so, I believe that I could point to the cause of your evident depression."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ida, scornfully.

"Yes, indeed," pursued Lady Malcolm; "can you imagine that I have never reflected upon the suffering with which you must dwell upon the estrangement from your parents? Surely not; and from the bottom of my heart I pity you. Have courage, my dear young friend; remember that there is a silver lining to every cloud; your father must have loved you deeply; have regarded you with pride as well as affection; and rest assured that when once the wound which you have inflicted upon his ambition has had time to heal, his heart will yearn towards you with a tenderness which he will not seek to control."

"I can only pray that your prophecy may be fulfilled before I have ceased to feel an interest in anything," said Mrs. Elphinstone, moodily; "for Hubert's sake I will hope, even when I cease to do so for myself."

"In that case judge of your father's heart by your own," replied her persevering comforter; "and I do entreat of you, struggle against a depression which is evidently undermining your health. I can see that Sydney is wretched about you."

"Sydney wretched about me!" echoed Ida, with a forced laugh; "I do not think that Sydney was ever more happy in his life. During the first few months of our marriage he was my devoted slave, poor fellow! obedient to all my caprices: subject to all my whims; and it was then, or never, that I might have supposed him to be wretched about me, as I must necessarily have involved him in every dangerous or disagreeable fancy in which I saw fit to indulge; but he is now altogether released from this peril; I have grown weary of practising upon his

patience ; he is perfectly independent in all his actions ; he comes and goes, unquestioned ; I make no demand upon either his time or his tenderness ; but receive with proper wifely gratitude the portion of each, which he finds it expedient and proper to bestow upon me."

"My dear young friend, you terrify me!" said Lady Malcolm uneasily ; "you are in a frightfully morbid state of mind ; and I sadly fear that, from some misconception or another, you are doing serious injustice to your husband."

"Oh no, no ! do not alarm yourself about *him*," was the quick retort ; "I can assure you that he makes no complaint ; and I have not a doubt, from his regular and unwearied attendance at the Temple, that his affairs are prospering there also. It is really admirable, is it not, Lady Malcolm, to see how pertinaciously he pursues his profession ? for, as I never hear of his spending the hours that he is absent from me elsewhere, I naturally conclude that he is at his chambers."

Her companion started ; had Ida laid bare her heart before her, she could not more thoroughly have read its secret than she did at that moment. Mrs. Elphinstone was the victim of jealousy, but who could be the object of her suspicion ? Vainly did Lady Malcolm ask herself the question ; Sydney had, at the request of his wife, so utterly abandoned the world, that the only conclusion at which she could arrive was, that Ida might possibly have been informed of some previous attachment on the part of her husband, which, now that the first effervescence of married happiness had subsided, was pressing upon her mind ; and even while she condemned such a weakness, the gentle-hearted matron could not withhold her sympathy for the self-tormenting sufferer.

"Will you forgive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone ;" she asked ; "if I hazard another guess ?—I cannot mistake your meaning—you doubt Sydney."

"Have I any cause to do so ?"

"Certainly none of which I am aware."

"In that case," observed Ida haughtily, "you might have spared me the suspicion."

Lady Malcolm rose.

"I am truly glad to find that I am in error," she said with dignity; "rejoiced alike for your own sake, and Sydney's, for believe me, Mrs. Elphinstone, when I assure you that no weakness on the part of a wife is so calculated to estrange a husband's heart as jealousy; where the suspicion is just he becomes irritated under his own sense of error, and where he is conscious of his own rectitude, he revolts from an accusation which robs the woman he has chosen of that charm of mental purity which had hitherto compelled his admiration and respect.

"I am, therefore, I repeat, most happy that I had wronged you, and you must pardon my offence, arising as it did out of my maternal anxiety for your mutual welfare."

"All apology is unnecessary," was the cold reply; "and I am really happy, in my turn, to have set your heart at rest. Question Sydney yourself, and I am convinced he will tell you that, however exacting I may have been for a time, I am now the very model of a wife. Oh, depend upon it, my dear Lady Malcolm, that should we again emerge from our hermitage, we shall be quoted as a marvel of connubial devotion; a species of show couple to be gazed upon with awe and admiration; a fitting example in fact, for my cousin Hubert and your fair daughter; and more than this, I am sure you cannot be unreasonable enough to wish."

Ida had overacted her part, but her companion was too judicious to suffer her to perceive this, although her heart ached as she slowly walked along the garden-path which led to her own house.

"Poor Sydney! Poor fated boy!" she murmured to herself; "this is even worse than I had feared. I have indeed lived to rejoice that *she* is in her grave, whose heart his misery would have broken. Yes—it is better so; this crowning sorrow she at least is spared."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FIRST BRIEF.

As a natural consequence of the state of things which we have described, Sydney Elphinstone gradually estranged himself more and more from his ungenial home ; and, with the impetuosity which formed so strong an element of his character, plunged into study with an ardour and perseverance that enabled him for many hours in the day to banish from his mind all memory of the blight which had withered the best feelings of his heart.

Shut into his chambers, half-buried with books, and grappling with difficulties from which he had hitherto shrunk with disgust, the gay young man of fashion had subsided into a plodding student ; lines of thought began to trace themselves upon his lofty brow ; his step became less buoyant, and his words more measured.

The youth was rapidly ripening into the sober maturity of manhood ; and if he rarely smiled, and the music of his ringing laughter was no longer heard, at least neither had been succeeded by the querulousness of discontent, or the gloom of asceticism.

Towards his wife he still exhibited the same watchful attention and courteous kindness as ever, but it was no longer with the lover-like devotion of old ; care had aged him in more than looks ; and while Ida wept in secret over a change which wrung the chords of her heart to agony, and remembered that it had been her own work, she bore it in silence rather than by one concession make an effort to repair the evil.

"How know I," she would murmur to herself, "that the hours of his absence are, indeed, spent in study ? How dare I even hope it, when I am so well aware that all mental exertion is antagonistic to his careless and impulsive nature ? Could I only be sure that such were the case, how different would be our relative position !"

"But no, no ! I must not yield ; it is clear from his continual and consistent coldness that his heart is no longer in

his home, and that it has found another resting-place. Be it so; I will endure the suspicion until it has grown into certainty, and then—then——”

A month or two passed on thus: and at their close the earnest prayer of Elphinstone was granted—he held a brief: nor was it the least agreeable or welcome feature of this long-wished-for event, that it had been offered to him at the desire of Lady Malcolm, who had at length decided on endeavouring to rescue at least a portion of her property from the unworthy hands into which it had fallen.

Information recently acquired had convinced her that her case was far from a hopeless one, if skilfully conducted; and, much as she shrank from the excitement and uncertainty of a lawsuit, she still felt that she owed a duty to her child which must be performed even at the expense of her own feelings; while the consciousness that she had it in her power at the same time to serve the son of her still-lamented friend greatly tended to reconcile her to the anxiety of the trial.

Thus then, when he had almost despaired of such a result to his labours, and had pursued them rather as a resource from more painful thought than as the necessary means to accomplish a career, Sydney found himself suddenly summoned to exert all his energies in a cause in which the best powers of his heart and intellect must be alike called forth.

His cheek glowed, and his breast heaved with excitement; he was now to try his strength—he was now to prove to Ida that her faith in his intellect at least had not been misplaced; she had ceased to love him, but he might still compel her respect; and then a shadow fell over his joy: how differently might he have gone forth to meet his first struggle, strengthened by her encouragement, elated by her conviction of his coming triumph. The blood faded from his brow, and fell back cold upon his heart; he still grasped the important document, but half its spell was broken.

Then he roused himself; he remembered that he was to be associated in his task with one of the most eminent counsel in England; and that he must endeavour by his

industry and care to render himself worthy of such an association ; that he must not suffer the success of a cause which involved the future independence of Edith Malcolm to be secured solely by the eloquence of Sir F—— T——, but that he must labour assiduously to convince his co-adjutor that, inexperienced as he was, he was nevertheless worthy of the trust which had been reposed in him.

His facilities for obtaining every information relative to the case were necessarily great ; and many an hour was spent at the villa of Lady Malcolm over papers and documents, or in confidential conversation connected with the one important subject ; hours which Ida might have known to be so spent, had she ever stooped to ask one question as to the manner in which he passed his time ; but this she never did : and when Sydney, in the exuberance of his exultation, informed her of the fact of his having received his first brief from Lady Malcolm, she congratulated him so coldly on the event that, stung to the very heart, he never again alluded to the subject, save to apologise for the lengthened absences to which he was compelled by the exigencies of his occupation.

Thus it was from her kind and sympathising acquaintance Mrs. Darnell alone, that she learnt the fact of her husband's long and frequent visits to the mother of Edith ; visits which were considered by both ladies as Elphinstone's chosen relaxation in his intervals of leisure.

"Was I not right to warn you?" was the triumphant inquiry of the visitor on such occasions ; "and what will you do now?"

"I will wait," was the unvarying reply.

And Ida did wait ; and meanwhile, brooding over her imagined wrongs, her gloom and coldness increased ; and had not the mind of her husband been absorbed by the one great interest of the moment—the pivot upon which he felt that all his future fortunes must necessarily turn,—it would have been impossible to have longer delayed an explanation which must have proved fatal to every hope of domestic happiness for ever.

As it was, however, Sydney perseveringly pursued his system of conciliation and kindness ; spoke cheerfully and

fondly to his wife ; caressed his child with a tenderness and pride which even trial and disappointment had failed to diminish ; and endeavoured by every means in his power to recal, were it only for a moment, the smiles of happier days.

Every comfort and even luxury permitted by their slender means he lavished upon Ida unsparingly ; but accustomed to other and far more costly indulgences, she had begun to disregard those which she still enjoyed, and to regret others which were beyond her reach.

Suffering had made her selfish ; had she not, by her one fatal fault thrown happiness far from her ? had she still trusted as deeply as she loved, she would have jested at every privation, and been careless of every sacrifice ; but now it was far otherwise ; the constant companionship of a coarse mind had produced its effect ; and she even felt a weak pride in upholding without murmur or reproach the character of a victim.

“ Poor dear Mrs. Elphinstone ! You really excite my wonder,” was the frequent exclamation of her confidential friend ; “ I cannot understand such fortitude and patience.”

But Ida was not strong ; she was not patient ; she was simply ungenerous and unjust. Was there no tacit murmur in the averted eye and the rigid lip ? no reproach in the moodiness of manner, and ungenial coldness of deportment, which checked the warm and honest impulses of her husband’s heart, and left him to fight his battle with the world, destitute alike of home sympathy and support.

Had she been made to comprehend the bitterness of his feelings in this utter isolation, she would have smiled, and gloried in the miserable triumph ; and gloried the more, because, even while she was thus torturing his noble and forbearing nature, she felt that he was necessary to her existence ; that she still loved him beyond all else on earth—even beyond her child—none knew or guessed how, in the solitary hours, she dwelt with intense and agitating anxiety upon his coming trial—how she prayed for his success—how she yearned to throw herself upon his neck, and send him forth strong in the armour of a wife and a woman’s love.

But no: in these moments of spiritual healthfulness, ever uprose the vision of Edith Malcolm, while the insidious venom of Mrs. Darnell's inferences fell like molten metal upon her mind's ear, scorching and withering all her better and purer impulses.

"He will be armed with *her* affection—he will be strong in *her* cause"—was ever the climax of her reverie. "It would be idle indeed for me to stand forth as his champion: one word of encouragement from *her* will suffice to arouse his best energies to action: and so let it be. For my boy's sake I will bear the burthen, heavy as it is, until its weight threatens to crush me to the earth: and then he shall be made to feel that I will not fall alone."

CHAPTER XL.

THE EARLY LOST.

WHILE the cloud thus darkened over the modest cottage at Brompton, suffering in a more tangible shape had made its abode under the stately roof of Trevanion Hall. The heir of that ancient house—the idol of his father's heart—the object of many a hope, and many a sigh—was rapidly sinking into a premature grave.

Hubert Trevanion, whose manly beauty and moral worth had endeared him to every heart, had ceased to struggle against the conviction that he was the destined victim of the insidious disease which had long been sapping the principle of existence; and while the preternaturally bright eye and blooming cheek deceived the fond father into a belief that a life of happiness and honour awaited his darling son, that son himself felt with a resignation rare and beautiful under such circumstances, that for him there existed no future upon earth.

Day by day, and almost hour by hour, he became aware that the silver cord was loosened, gently and gradually, but not the less surely.

Often did he yearn to throw one gleam of light upon his father's mind; to awaken him to at least a possibility of their early separation; but his strength of purpose was

insufficient for the effort. He felt that he *dared* not turn the proud and exulting happiness of his last parent into bitterness and mourning.

"The blow will come soon enough, come when it may," he would murmur to himself, as he listened with a brow steeped in the chilly moisture of exhaustion, and with closed eyes, to the projects of the unconscious baronet, in all of which he was necessarily involved; and while Sir Jasper talked with enthusiasm of the fair young creature who would, as he trusted, ere long become the mistress of the Hall, Hubert, instead of a wedding-garment, saw only a shroud; instead of wedded bliss, revelling in light and life, only inanition and a grave.

With mistaken and persevering affection he continued, however, to rally his failing energies, and little did those who saw him the companion of his father's rides and walks, the indefatigable sharer in all his pursuits, and the anxious promoter of all his enjoyments, imagine at what a price the devoted sor. at length purchased the privilege of brightening and gladdening the declining years of his self-deceived parent.

Often, after a long attendance in a heated justice-room, or a rapid gallop over the downs, when the baronet returned home excited and refreshed by a sense of duty performed, or a healthful sensation of augmented vigour, his son, after a painful effort of simulated strength, no sooner found himself alone in his chamber than he tottered to a couch, where, bathed in the cold and clammy dews of consumption, and labouring for breath, he lay shivering and helpless, until by the aid of some powerful stimulant, he once more recovered sufficient energy to resume the wasting struggle.

At the close of a few months, however, this fearful exertion became no longer possible. His physical powers were exhausted; the flush upon his cheek deepened and concentrated itself into a burning spot; the fire of the large dark eye gleamed keen and cold; and this noble form became attenuated and feeble. Whispers circulated among the household, and many and earnest were the anxious looks turned on him by the gray-haired retainers of the family.

"It was thus," said the most aged among them, "that his grandfather had died—it was thus that he would die; the child of prayers and hopes, in whom his father had garnered up all his affections, for whom his mother had hoarded all her wealth."

It was strange, very strange, that Sir Jasper did not see that he was perishing before his eyes: but, at length, came the low and hollow cough, that sound of doom which can never be mistaken; the slight but painful spasm by which it was succeeded; the quivering of the wasted hand; the uncertain accents, which at intervals rendered the once melodious voice hoarse and discordant; and then indeed, even the doting father, whose pride in his only son had hitherto cast out fear, could no longer delude himself with the belief that all was well with the object of his idolatry.

The blow smote the stately old man to the earth; and in the first agony of his grief he gave way to a vehemence of feeling which had nearly proved fatal to the invalid. Medical assistance was summoned from far and near—there *must* yet be hope.

Alas! there was none. The fiat had gone forth; and Hubert Trevanion, the last representative of his ancient family, gifted with all that the world can offer to its favourites—youth, and wealth, and intellect—a noble person, and a heart rich in the best and holiest impulses of human nature, was about to share the common fate of all created beings.

No mortal skill, even although purchased with the ransom of a kingdom, could avail him now; and he learnt his fate from the friendly physician—who had been induced, at his own entreaty, to name the probable period of his release from suffering—without the quivering of a pulse.

"My poor father!" was all he said as he ascertained that his very hours were numbered; "how will he bear this blow?"

"Sir Jasper is a man and a Christian, my dear sir," observed his companion soothingly.

"But he is also a father," murmured Hubert, as he swept back the masses of dark hair which clung dankly about his brow; "and so strong a link cannot be wrenched

asunder without a struggle too powerful for his age. I must not, however, dwell upon this painful thought, or it may unnerve me when he most requires my support."

"Right, right," said the physician; "you must strive to keep up both his spirits and your own, difficult as it may be to do so; but you are equal to the effort, as I well know."

Hubert smiled sadly; for himself he was resigned; he had long felt that his doom was sealed, and that he was predestined to an early death; but he could not so certainly contemplate the suffering of a father to whom he knew that he was all in all; and while, had he been alone in the world, he could have yielded his last sigh almost without regret, he felt a yearning to live for his father's sake, which shook him to the very depths of his spirit.

"Thank you for your frankness," he said, as, at the close of a violent paroxysm of coughing, he withdrew the handkerchief from his lips, and held it towards his medical friend, deeply stained with blood; "although, as you see, all further attempt at self-delusion would be useless on my part, even were I weak enough to encourage it; and now I have a last favour to ask of you——"

"Name it."

"Will you undertake to break the truth to my poor father? the whole truth, I mean. For the abstract fact of my early death he is already prepared; but I would fain see him reconciled to the probability, nay, the certainty, of its almost immediate occurrence. Will you oblige me in this?"

"I cannot."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I have been acquainted with Sir Jasper for the last forty years," said Dr. Fernley; "and am well aware that although, like all his fellow-men, he has had many annoyances to combat, he has never yet been subjected to the searching trial of a great sorrow. Some one who has less regard for him than myself must undertake the task."

"Yet who could perform it so tenderly?"

"You mistake, my young friend, you mistake," said the worthy doctor with an emotion which sufficiently attested his sincerity. "It must be done by one who will not feel

with him as well as for him. It is the only request of yours with which I cannot comply."

"I regret it deeply," replied Hubert; "for in that case, painful as the effort will be, I must communicate the fact myself. I could not bear that his first and bitter grief should be exposed to the eye of a stranger, or a hireling."

"It will destroy you!"

"No," said the dying man firmly; "my last act will have been one of duty, even of mercy, and that consciousness will give me strength; but it must be done at once, for I dare not dwell on the trial that is before me; I should only multiply my own moments of suffering."

"Let me entreat of you, Mr. Trevanion——"

"Nay, nay, do not unman me unnecessarily before-hand; my purpose is fixed, and I am too physically weak to contend, although morally strong enough to persist in my purpose. Only do me the favour to be present at our interview; he may need your assistance,—perhaps I may even need it myself."

"Only wait until to-morrow."

"That were worse than useless. My poor father! He has now but little time for preparation; why should I, by my cowardice, seek to abridge it? Surely it is wiser and better that his grief should have time to subside into resignation before——"

"Well, well; be it as you will," said his companion reluctantly; "but I own that I could have wished——"

"You will comply with my request," interposed Hubert with a sad smile; "and I thank you. Saunders shall summon his master at once, and my first and most bitter pang will then be over."

The physician was silent; for, even while he admired the courage and self-abnegation of his patient, he shrank from its probable result.

Ten minutes afterwards the baronet, with bowed head and unsteady step, entered the sick-room.

An hour passed away. There are periods, or, at least, there is ever one period in the lives of even the most favoured of human beings, when an age of suffering may be compressed into one brief hour of existence; but although

the anxious watchers in Sir Jasper's household, dreading they knew not what, and fearing to question their own hearts, lingered near the door of the death-chamber,—no sound escaped thence from which they might infer what was passing within; the arrow which enters the heart does its work noiselessly; nor was it until they saw their master come forth, leaning on the arm of Dr. Fernley, bent as though the weight of twenty additional years had suddenly fallen upon him, turning meekly and unquestioningly in the direction where he was led, his eyes glossy and tearless, and the muscles about his mouth quivering as though he no longer retained any power over their action, that they understood how surely all hope was at an end.

Morning broke, clear, and cold, and grey; the birds began to twitter among the boughs, and the deer to shake the dew from their dappled hides, and to emerge from their nightly covert. The lowing of cattle came upon the wind, and at distant intervals the cheerful whistle of the early hind was audible from the low pasture-lands. The world was once more awake; but on a sumptuous bed, in a darkened room, surrounded by all the appliances of wealth and all the cares of affection, lay one for whom sight and sound could no more be, and for whom there was no awakening upon earth.

Hubert Trevanion had passed away for ever, and so calmly, that his anxious watchers could not even guess at what precise moment the dreamless sleep which so mysteriously transforms the living sentient being into the dull, inert, and passionless atom retaining nothing of humanity save its outward semblance, had fallen upon him.

The dead was at peace; at peace in his manly beauty; another brief week, and he would be but a memory; while by his side sat his grey-haired father, who had stolen to the death-room, as noiselessly as though his muffled step would have disturbed the sleeper.

His quick ear had caught and interpreted the hurried whispers of the attendants; and without the utterance of a word, he had motioned them all from the room, fastened the door behind him, and sat down tearlessly beside his dead son.

Close to the pillow that supported his head ; so close that his thick laboured breath heaved the dark curls which rested on the spotless cambric ; and sometimes he clutched at the sheet by which the body was covered, and sometimes he passed his hand slowly over the noble features, as if to impress their outlines more forcibly upon his memory.

Morning brightened, and the eastern sky became one prism of glory ; the song of the wild birds pealed out an universal chorus, from which the clear and exulting notes of the early lark detached themselves like the triumphant outgushing of an emancipated soul ascending in rapture far above the dregs and dross of earth. Nature was gladdened by the birth of a new day ; and the sons of toil were already entering upon its duties ; but still the death-chamber was closed.

“This must not be—this should not have been,”—exclaimed Dr. Fernley, the noise of whose carriage-wheels had been the first sound which awoke upon the deep silence of the mansion ; “why were you so imprudent as to permit your master to shut himself in with his dead son ? The door must be opened instantly.”

Vain, however, were all his efforts to obtain admission ; there was no answer to his earnest appeals, and at length the lock was forced, when the unfortunate old man was found stretched across the body of his son, as insensible as the pale form upon which he rested.

Hours passed ere he was restored to consciousness ; and even then, his return to existence was pitiable. Obedient as a child, he complied with every request, and resigned himself to every arrangement with a vague, unmeaning smile, which betrayed that he had lost all power of volition ; at intervals he wrung his hands, and murmured out “My son ! my son !” But these intervals were rare, and for days he continued a mere human machine, mindless and will-less.

Under these circumstances, Dr. Fernley, who had established himself at the Hall, had no alternative save to ascertain the name and address of his nearest relative, in order that he might be summoned to superintend the arrangements which were imperative under the circumstances ; and,

accordingly, an express was dispatched to Mr. Trevanion, the nephew who had been for so many years an exile from his ancestral home, and who was thus suddenly called upon to assume the duties of its master.

The last sad offices were performed for the dead, while the bereaved father sat supinely in his cushioned chair, clad in a suit of sables, over which his dull eye glanced without perception or emotion, and the long-estranged relative, who had never exchanged one sentence with his heir, officiated as chief mourner at his funeral.

And then Mr. Trevanion entered upon the more onerous responsibilities of his position. At the express request of the family physician, a consultation was held upon the unhappy baronet, whose mental condition was declared to be beyond hope, although his bodily health still promised, as they unanimously declared, to withstand the shock.

CHAPTER XLI.

SOLITARY REFLECTIONS.

“AND now, gentlemen;” said Mr. Travanion, as the party withdrew from the chamber of the sufferer; “I must, before we separate, request that I may be favoured with your advice regarding my unfortunate uncle. I have personal duties to perform which entirely preclude the possibility of my residence at the Hall, or my own superintendence of his health and comfort, which must be my first consideration. All other points are of minor importance, and may bide their time.”

“That Sir Jasper Trevanion has executed a Will there can be no doubt, while it is equally certain that it must have been made in favour of his son; there cannot, therefore, exist any necessity for torturing him by efforts (which would, moreover, in all probability prove abortive) to make him comprehend the necessity of such a precaution; even did his present state of mind hold out any prospect that such a document, executed under such circumstances, could be considered as a legal one.

“All I apprehend, therefore, that can be done, is to en-

sure his perfect comfort and convenience so long as he is spared; and I am anxious that those should be scrupulously and efficiently secured. As I know little of the personal tastes or idiosyncracies of my uncle, I am by no means qualified to decide on the most desirable mode of effecting such an object; nor should I feel satisfied to follow the suggestions of mere domestics, who, however attached to their afflicted master, may err in their estimate of his requirements. I therefore appeal to you, I shall feel gratified by your assistance."

"Frank and manly, Mr. Trevanion," said Sir D—— D——; "but no more than I should have anticipated from *you*. Your position, as regards the invalid, is difficult and peculiar, but he could not have fallen into better hands. You are right; he is powerless now, and you can afford to forget the past."

"After the scene which I have just witnessed," was the reply, "the past is only to be regretted. I have learnt a stern lesson in that silent room. I now feel only that Sir Jasper Trevanion is my nearest kinsman, and the head of my house."

"And in that house let him remain, my good sir," broke in Dr. C——; "it would be like rending the ivy from the oak, to remove him from his old and accustomed home."

"I am quite of that opinion," said Mr. Trevanion; "and, moreover, that the attendants to whom he has become habituated should also remain about him. With two of them I am myself familiar, as they were already installed here in my boyhood, and have grown grey in the service of their master. I have had interviews with both since my arrival, and they are anxious to end their days under the roof which has for so many years been their only home. I know them to be thoroughly trustworthy; and I think that, could Sir Jasper be consulted on the subject, he would be as desirous as myself that they should retain their present sway over his household."

"You allude, of course," remarked Dr. Fernley, "to Mrs. Pearson and Tomkins?"

"I do."

"Admirably decided. In fact I do not see how the ser-

vices of either one or the other could now be dispensed with; the worthy old housekeeper is worth her weight in gold in a sick-room, while her coadjutor is equally valuable in his own department."

"We will, if you please, gentlemen, put his abilities to the test," said the merchant, as he laid his hand upon the bell; "after your hurried journey you must require some refreshment."

As no objection was raised to the suggestion, a speedy adjournment was made to the dining-room; where, enlivened by a well-spread board, and some of the choicest wines from the baronet's cellar, the sufferings of the invalid himself were soon forgotten by the professional brethren, who entered into a political discussion, with as much earnestness as they had previously done into the ailments of their patient; while Mr. Trevanion, seated at the head of that table to which he had been so grudgingly admitted in his youth, was compelled to take his part in the conversation, and to affect an interest which he was far from feeling in the subject of their discourse, occupied as he then was with objects of more personal consideration and anxiety.

"It strikes me, Mr. Trevanion," observed Sir D—— D——, as he dissected a partridge, "that you would do well to ingratiate yourself with the landholders of the county, to whom, as I am informed, you are almost, if not entirely a stranger. Take my word for it that we are on the eve of a general election, and it would be idle to stand on ceremony under present circumstances. Sir Jasper, poor man! is naturally *hors de combat*, and you are his most fitting successor. I have some interest here myself, and shall be most happy to exert it in your favour."

"In that case we shall have a contest," said Dr. Fernley; "as Lord Dronemore has long been anxious to start his elder son."

"What! The poet who has just returned from the Pyramids?"

"The same."

"But, my good sir, we want politicians, not poets, in the Lower House," interposed Dr. C——; "sound practical men, who care little to hear themselves talk working

bees, who will know how to store their own hive—not honourable tourists who scatter their honey that others may hoard it.”

“Perhaps so ; but I still adhere to my opinion. What say you, Mr. Trevanion ?”

“Simply, that I never intend to offer myself to the electors of ———, until I have a stake in the county.”

“Unfortunately,” observed Sir D—— D——, with a courtly inclination of the head, “the prospect is by no means a remote one, and the subject appears to me to be worthy of consideration.”

“Had I a son ——” commenced the merchant.

“You have, I believe, a grandson,” said Dr. Fernley.

Mr. Trevanion started. The existence of Ida’s child had been a forbidden topic in his presence from the moment of its birth ; and he was consequently unprepared for so abrupt a reminder. The stern man had resolved to forget the fact himself ; and, as a natural consequence with one of his peculiar character, he had calculated that others would follow his example.

“My grandson is not a Trevanion ;” he remarked coldly.

“True ; but that circumstance does not militate against the fact that he is heir-presumptive to the baronetcy.”

The merchant winced again.

“And a fine little fellow he is,” pursued the pertinacious physician ; “I never saw a more noble boy.”

“You are a fortunate man, sir,” said Dr. C——, who was entirely ignorant of the family history ; “and we will, with your permission, drink to the young man’s health in a bumper of this splendid hock.”

Mr. Trevanion bowed stiffly, as his guests prepared to do honour to the proposed pledge ; he even raised the glass to his lips as the toast was drunk, but the cool liquid seemed to scorch him, and not one word of acknowledgment followed the draught.

“And now, gentlemen,” said Dr. Fernley, to whom the silence which succeeded was perfectly intelligible, “I must request of you to excuse me, as I have two important visits to make before sunset.”

“While I,” followed up Sir D—— D——, “must be

back in town to-night, and consequently have little time to spare. It is wonderful how the hours fly by when one is pleasantly engaged."

"While your carriages are preparing," said the family physician, "will you allow me to suggest that we should take a parting look at our unfortunate friend Sir Jasper?"

"By all means," was the ready reply, and once more the party ascended to the baronet's sick room, but every effort to rouse him into mental consciousness again failed; and the men of science finally departed, leaving the weary and irritated merchant alone in the vast and lonely mansion.

Then it was, that, abandoned to himself, and left to wrestle with his own thoughts for the first time since this signal change had taken place in his social position, Mr. Trevanion keenly felt the isolation which his own vindictive passions had created about him.

The garrulous old physician was right; he had a grandson, and that grandson must one day, should he live to manhood, inherit the lordly estates, and the proud title of his ancestors, while the daughter whom he had cast forth, alike from his heart and from his hearth, would rule over a splendid home for which she would be indebted to her son and not to him.

The thought was wormwood to him! And then, as his eye travelled over the vast dimensions of the gorgeous rooms in which he sat, he pictured to himself the crouching insignificant form of his wife, who would probably at an early period become its temporary mistress, and with a sensation of disgust and scorn, he rose and paced the floor like one suddenly awakened to a sense of injury.

The frivolous Miss Clara Rotheringbury, the inert and mindless Mrs. Hubert Trevanion, to fill the place of his own beautiful and high-born mother! The proud man shuddered as he contemplated such a contingency, while slowly, and uninvoked, there rose up before him the radiant vision of his daughter; that daughter whose beauty and whose grace had flattered his vanity and satisfied his pride; and, like one under the influence of mesmerism, unable to contend against a will stronger than his own, the picture broadened and deepened until she seemed to stand before him with her

infant in her arms, her proud brow growing with matronly dignity, and her eyes bright with natural love.

It was a splendid picture, and the merchant's heart throbbed as he lingered on it; but after a while he shook off the spell.

"Perhaps it must be so," he murmured to himself; "but not yet—not yet—Hubert Trevanion will not forgive, even if *Sir* Hubert be ultimately compelled to do so. I am still master of my own actions; and when no longer able to control them, I must e'en follow the example of the French prince, and not suffer the long-descended baronet to revenge the injuries of the money-seeking merchant. Yet, when I remember that she might have entered this house as a peeress, it almost maddens me!

"And to think too that *he*—that the vain boy who, by a few idle flatteries, blighted all my views—that *he* may one day play the master here—I could almost wish that the poor old man who crushed my youth, and who now in his helplessness cannot resist the slightest of my wishes, might live on until the world and the world's honours had ceased to hold out any charm to the penniless adventurer who robbed me of my daughter."

It was fortunate that, at this period of his self-communing, Mr Trevanion chanced to remember that he had still many and important duties to perform before he left the Hall; and with his habitual energy he immediately prepared to execute them. There were solicitors and land-stewards to consult and instruct; tenants to receive, servants to discharge, and a host of minor arrangements to make, as essential as they were harassing.

At length, however, all was accomplished. The papers of Sir Jasper, including his will, of which a duplicate was in the possession of his attorney, were duly examined and sealed; the family diamonds and those of the late Lady Trevanion, all of which had been recently reset for the destined bride of the unhappy Hubert, together with the costly service of plate, were transferred, under the care of Tompkins, to the baronet's banker in town; leases that were falling in were renewed, in accordance with the instructions previously given by Sir Jasper; the wages of the several servants retained at the Hall were doubled; the

stud was reduced, and all the equipages, save one, were disposed of.

Nothing, in short, remained to be done, when Mr. Trevanion took his departure from the Hall, which could conduce to the convenience or security of its afflicted master ; while so ably had the still active Pearson seconded his efforts that, while in the apartments tenanted by the baronet all was luxury and comfort, even the strong-minded merchant felt his heart sink with a strange sensation of awe and repulsion as he traversed the spacious suite of state-rooms, and found their gorgeous draperies and stately mirrors shrouded in their Holland coverings. Life seemed indeed to have been put out in the home of his fathers.

"I shall close the gallery altogether, sir, as soon as you are gone," said the ancient house-keeper in a low voice, as she followed him in his last circuit of the mansion, her voluminous black garments sweeping with melancholy monotony along the uncarpeted floors ; "and only open it to air the rooms, and to dust the furniture, all of which will of course be done under my own eye. You know that you can trust me, Master Hubert—I beg pardon, sir, I meant to have said, Mr. Trevanion, but really now, when all seems to have passed away except yourself, my old brain is clearer about early days than on what is going on about me. Poor Sir Jasper ! To think that he who was a boy to me, should have come to this, while I am still hale and able ; it is strange and sad indeed, sir, is it not ? And that dear boy—the sweetest youth that ever trod the earth, gone too ! How often he made me talk of you, Master Hubert, and tell him how, although you went out from these doors without a friend, to seek your fortune in the wide world, you came to be a great and a rich man, the companion of proud lords, and a guest in the king's palace."

"But how came you to know all this, my good Pearson?" demanded the merchant with a curiosity which he could not repress.

"Oh, sir, we always knew all about you," was the eager reply, as planting the stick by which she was compelled to support herself while walking, the aged woman suddenly stopped in order to give greater emphasis to her words "for

you were no sooner gone than Sir Jasper, poor old gentleman! began to have a thousand fears about you; and although he never dared to name your name before her ladyship, he often talked to Tompkins and his own man about his unhappy nephew; and I do believe, Master Hubert, that if you had only bent your pride to write a letter to my master, and to ask him——”

“I had nothing to ask of him, Pearson.”

“More’s the pity, sir, more’s the pity that you had not; for then we should have had happier hearts at the old hall.”

“So then I am to understand that Sir Jasper—that my uncle—really did regret his harshness when it was too late.”

“Indeed he did, Master Hubert, indeed he did; and of late years, since my lady died, often and often did he and his poor dear son tell me how honoured and how happy you were, and what a credit you were to the family name; and that you had a daughter so beautiful that she might have married the greatest lord in the land.”

“And so she might,” said the merchant bitterly, “but she did not.”

“So I heard, sir, so I heard; but then Sir Jasper learnt from her own lips that she had wedded the man of her heart; and such a boy as she had, my master said; it was really wonderful to hear him talk of that child; and of course you know, sir, that the poor youth you laid to rest only a few days back was to have been his godfather, although he was too ill to go up to town for the christening.”

“Ha! indeed!” exclaimed her startled listener; “was Mr. Hubert Trevanion really to have been the sponsor of Master Sydney Elphinstone?”

“Of your daughter’s son, sir,” said Pearson, “but he was to be called Hubert, the young lady would have it so, they told me, because it was her father’s name.”

“It is cold here, my good Pearson,” said the merchant huskily, “let us leave these desolate-looking rooms. Poor Sir Jasper! How much I wish that he could recognise me before I leave.”

“No, sir, no, there is no hope of that,” whispered the housekeeper mysteriously, “my master’s mind will not come back to this world till he is about to leave it altogether, and

then it will be but a blink of light, faint and feeble, so that soul and body may go together."

"A strange doctrine that, my good old friend," smiled Mr. Trevanion, "but we will hope better things. Who knows? The constitution of my uncle's a sound one, and he may yet rally."

"Aye," murmured the aged dame, "he *will* rally, but it will only be at the sound of that trumpet which will call us all from our long sleep. And now you had better go to the dining-room at once, Master Hubert, there is a fine fire there, and your dinner will be served in a few minutes."

CHAPTER XLII.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

GREAT was the astonishment of Lady Mary Brooklands, for of the actual mistress of the house there was no question, when she was requested by Mr. Trevanion on his return to town, to oblige him by putting the female servants of his establishment into the handsomest mourning compatible with their station; and that, at the same time, a hundred pound note was placed in her hand, with a respectful entreaty that she would be good enough herself to appear in the same sable habiliments in honour of his deceased relative.

"Do me the favour also, my dear Lady Mary," he said, "to impress upon Mrs. Trevanion the necessity of wearing the deepest sables, for I have almost a twofold death to deplore; as I have not only buried poor Hubert, but have, moreover, left my unfortunate uncle in a state of living death, even worse than actual annihilation. She cannot, as I well know, appreciate the delicacy of my position without your prompting, and I consequently throw myself, as far as she is concerned, upon your accustomed kindness and consideration."

"Rely on it that I will do all that is right, my dear sir," was the reply of the lady, as she crushed the fragment of tissue paper between her glove and her hand; "and I am

sure you will believe me when I say, that your anxiety to do everything in a proper manner, and one suited to your position in the world, on so melancholy an occasion as this, is precisely what I should have expected from you.

"Dear me!" she pursued, dropping into a chair, and assuming an expression of sentimental sympathy; "what a trying visit yours must have proved, Mr. Trevanion; father and son at one blow—or rather from what you tell me, it would have been less deplorable, had the bereaved old gentleman really followed his child to the grave."

"There can be no doubt of it," replied her companion in the same tone; "no doubt on earth of it; for his condition is, as you judiciously remark, indeed deplorable. Mindless and powerless, he retains nothing of humanity but the form; and so long as he survives, I see little hope of any amendment."

The affair is altogether very untoward," observed Lady Mary, carefully examining the pattern of the Valenciennes upon her handkerchief.

"Worse, worse," said the merchant contracting his heavy eyebrows, "my responsibility has suddenly become most painful."

"But, in a sensible point of view, you are actually the head of the family, and the representative of the Trevanions."

"True, in a sensible point of view, but not in a legal one; I am, in fact, nothing more than the guardian of Sir Jasper, and have neither power nor influence while he lives."

"It is monstrously provoking!" drawled the family friend, "and I know by experience how long, how very long, persons in his peculiar state *do* often live. Where there is no wear on the mind, the body is wonderfully tenacious of existence."

"It is at least consolatory that he suffers no pain," said Mr. Travanion, calmly.

"Very," was the retort, as the titled matron applied her handkerchief to her nose; "but still—you will excuse me, I know, if I repeat that the whole thing is nevertheless

monstrously provoking. The baronet, by your account, does not live, he only vegetates ; and I confess that, feeling as I do towards yourself, I could have wished——”

“No, no ; I thank you for your interest in my welfare, Lady Mary,” interposed the merchant, “but I must not suffer myself to glance at what might have been.”

“Yet he had injured you so deeply.”

“Like many other men who pride themselves upon their moral strength, he was at last compelled to succumb to a stronger will than his own, but I have had satisfactory proof that he repented his harshness when it was too late.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Lady Mary ; “if the abstract fact affords you the slightest gratification. And now, my dear sir, that Ida’s son has become an important little personage in your family, I trust that you will be induced to pardon her *escapade*. As you are well aware, with all my affection for the dear girl, I have never hitherto presumed to plead her cause.”

“I am aware of it, Lady Mary, and have estimated your delicacy at its just value. No—you have never striven, by word or look, to moderate my just resentment.”

“I could not venture to do so ; my position as a relative of Mr. Elphinstone’s was so onerous, that I shrank from every species of interference.”

“I fully estimated the reasons of your silence. Had you, like her mother, harassed me by weak repinings and still more idle reproaches, the breach between us could never have been repaired.”

“That was precisely what I felt, my dear sir, but now——”

“Now, madam, I must have time to reflect. A father whose child deceives him, and elopes from beneath his roof, leaving him to brave as he best may the comments of the world, merits but little indulgence at the hands of her outraged parent ; and I tell you frankly, Lady Mary Brooklands, that had Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone become the mother of a girl, instead of presenting an heir to the Trevanions, I would have abandoned her for ever to the miserable obscurity of her present lot.”

“But as it is ?”

“As it is, I shall be ruled by circumstances: I am not yet Sir Hubert Trevanion, and I can afford to wait.”

Little did the stern and unrelenting father imagine that his daughter had, like himself, declared her willingness to “bide her time.”

The disconcerted Lady Mary, who, on the restoration of her nephew's wife to favour, had rapidly built up a cloud-castle of advantage to herself, was too much accustomed to the inflexions of Mr. Trevanion's voice and the portentous action of his eyebrows, to prolong the discussion; and accordingly, after having pledged herself to superintend the personal arrangements of Mrs. Trevanion on this important occasion, she hastened to terminate the interview; and so well did she redeem her pledge that within a week the merchant's wife, despite her “dear me's,” “how very disagreeable's,” and sundry other inane expletives, found herself attired in the deepest sables for a man whom she had never seen, and who she had been taught to regard with aversion as an impediment in her husband's path towards greatness.

Nevertheless, with her usual apathy, she resigned herself to her fate. She had, as we have shown, long ceased to contend; and although on Ida's evasion from the paternal roof, she did, with the true instinct of a mother's heart, for a time revolt against the inflexible harshness of her husband, the mere force of habit soon crushed her back into her habitual insignificance; and surrounding herself with novels, she endeavoured to forget her own sorrows in those of her favourite heroines, and suffered the titled matron who had usurped her place in the household not only to act but even to think for her.

The mental condition of Mrs. Trevanion in her Richmond Villa was little superior to that of Sir Jasper in his ancestral halls.

Far different was the effect produced by the intelligence of the melancholy events which had taken place in——, on the two families so closely allied by blood and friendship to the baronet and his son.

Upon Lady Malcolm, who had anticipated a life of honour and affection for her gentle Edith, the blow fell heavily in-

deed; although she derived consolation from the fact that the fair girl herself, however she might, and undoubtedly did, admire and respect Hubert Trevanion, had yet seen too little of him to render her sorrow at his loss of more than a temporary nature; Edith was, in truth, only learning to love him; her young heart had been awakened, but not won; and though she wept, it was rather in pity for his fate than in regret at her own disappointment; while her mother, with all a mother's anxiety, looked into the future of her child, and shuddered as she felt how suddenly it had become a void.

Their retired existence, which had hitherto been brightened and gladdened by a thousand innocent and happy projects for the future, had in one brief moment lost its charm; the one perpetual subject of discourse had become only a theme of sorrow and regret; the light of their modest dwelling was extinguished; and as Lady Malcolm, with a troubled eye, followed the movements of her daughter, her heart swelled, and for the first time in her life she felt disposed to repine.

The grief of Mrs. Elphinstone was twofold; for even in the brief interviews which had taken place between them, she had learnt to love her long-estranged relatives; while the only ray of sunshine which her miserable infatuation permitted to fall upon her heart, was the hope of soon being relieved from the presence of Miss Malcolm by her marriage with Hubert Trevanion.

That hope had now passed away for ever; while the calm and unimpassioned resignation of Edith, who, in the presence of her mother, even restrained her tears in order not to augment the distress of her parent, awoke a new suspicion in the self-tormenting mind of Ida.

"She never loved him," she murmured to herself: "she never loved him, or she would have needed the consolation which she is so eager to afford. What can be the blighted ambition of a mother when placed in competition with a heart whose first affection is cast back upon it?

"No, no! she would have shed other tears over the grave of Sydney Elphinstone; her secret passion was hope-

less, and she had self-control enough to obey the bidding of her manœuvring parent.

“Poor child! she is playing her part badly now, when even *I* can detect the truth. Hubert is happy to have escaped a fate like mine; better to die young—aye, to die a thousand deaths,—than to live on, unloved and neglected, when all the illusions of hope and passion are rent away, and the bleak, bare realities of existence alone remain.”

And with this gratuitous suffering came a renewed feeling of isolation; the tie which had existed between herself and Sir Jasper, and which was to have been rendered still closer through her child, had greatly tended to reconcile her to the unrelenting silence of her father, which she now felt with double force.

In the early months of her marriage, the passionate devotion of her husband had sufficed to render her independent of all other affection, and she had consequently endured it with patience and submission as the consequence of her own act; but now, when she believed the heart of Sydney to be estranged from her, she shrank appalled at her loneliness.

There did appear, indeed, no prospect of a reconciliation now, when the unhappy events which had taken place in the family, and which would have afforded so favourable an opportunity for Mr. Trevanion to summon his only child once more to her home, had been coldly and officially announced to her by Sir Jasper’s attorney, in precisely the same form as they had been made known to Lady Malcolm.

Never, until this moment, had Mrs. Elphinstone confessed, even to herself, that she had involuntarily looked beyond the affection to the generosity of her uncle; and it was, consequently, with terror that she remembered how fearfully her slender fortune had dwindled away, and that she had no longer a friend on earth to whom she could appeal for assistance.

On Sydney’s professional gains she had long ceased to calculate; it was Sir Jasper’s intercession with her father which had formed the mainstay of her hope, and now Sir Jasper was dead to all human sympathies.

She strained her infant to her heart almost convulsively as these fearful thoughts flashed across her brain. What would become of her boy? For herself, she could die; death had no terrors for her; it would be peace, and rest, and oblivion; but her noble boy—he was too young, too beautiful, too beloved, not to live long and happily; and yet to what a fate was he reserved!

Her own trials faded before her fears for him; and as his soft arms encircled her neck, and his rosy cheek rested against hers, the wife was forgotten in the mother, and she shed tears as holy as an angel might have registered.

It was in this wild burst of grief, to which she had yielded herself up immediately after the departure of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, that she was discovered by her husband on his return from the assize-town where the cause, upon which he had been engaged for Lady Malcolm, had been tried and gained in a manner which had surpassed his most sanguine hopes. Sir F—— T——, upon whose well-known eloquence its success was considered mainly to depend, when in the very act of putting on his gown, had been seized with sudden and violent indisposition: his appearance in court was accordingly impossible; and it was too late to secure the services of any other leading counsel.

Under these circumstances there was no alternative save to leave the cause entirely in the hands of Mr. Elphinstone, whose familiarity with all its details rendered him the most eligible person to conduct it; and it was consequently fortunate that the industry of the young man in the first place, and his intense anxiety for his friend at the critical moment when he was called upon to incur so heavy a responsibility, produced a degree of excitement that for the time overcame the nervousness to which, on his first appearance in so prominent a position, he would most probably have yielded.

Forgetting his own identity in the important duty before him, he watched the case as it proceeded with a care and tenacity which enabled him to garner up every fact and argument adduced by the opposing counsel; and when, after closely and cleverly cross-questioning the witnesses brought against him, he at length rose in his turn to reply, the ease and skill with which he analysed and commented

upon the speech of his opponent, the lucid manner in which he brought forward and connected his own proofs, the extraordinary grace of his action, the animation of his handsome countenance, and, above all, his minute acquaintance with every detail of the case, however trifling and futile in appearance, soon excited universal attention.

The Judge leant forward in his seat, evidently interested both in the cause and the orator; the gentlemen of the bar desisted from their several occupations; squibs were left half-written, and caricatures half-sketched; the audience were silent and absorbed; while even the opposing counsel, who, on finding himself pitted against a mere youth, a legal novice hitherto unknown on the circuit, had performed his duty somewhat less punctiliously than usual, was observed more than once to suffer an approving gesture to escape him, as the speech proceeded.

But the enthusiastic speaker noticed nothing of all this; his whole heart was in his cause; nor did he imagine, when he at last resumed his seat, that in the estimation of most of his professional brethren his cause was already gained. Such, indeed, was the result, and Sydney Elphinstone was both a proud and a happy man when, to his surprise and gratification, he heard himself complimented by the learned Judge who had presided, and congratulated by the counsel who were seated about him; while, as the climax of his triumph, he had scarcely been an hour at his hotel when a note from his intended coadjutor was placed in his hand, containing not only the thanks and felicitations of Sir F——T——, but also the handsome fee with which his own eminent services had been retained.

“The gold which you have so ably won, my dear sir, you must be content to wear,” said the high-minded lawyer, “and I trust that you will accept with it my very sincere hope that we shall ere long meet again with the same happy result.”

His first step towards forensic celebrity was taken, and the ground was firm beneath him.

Such were the circumstances under which the young husband returned to his home, only, as already stated, to find his wife absorbed in grief.

"Ida, my own, my darling Ida," he exclaimed, as he hurried to her side, and folded her to his heart, forgetting everything save his love and her sorrow, "what has happened? why do I find you in this miserable state? Speak, darling—do not torture me with suspense."

Mrs. Elphinstone replied, by placing in his hand the letter which announced the death of Hubert Trevanion, and the imbecility of his father.

Sydney was greatly shocked.

"This is indeed appalling!" he said, in an accent of deep feeling; "how I pity your poor father, who will, no doubt, be greatly shocked that all possibility of a reconciliation with his family is now over. Do not think me heartless, Ida; however painful these facts are, it is a consolation to me to find that no misfortune has happened to either yourself or our boy."

"Myself!" echoed his wife, bitterly; "and is it then no misfortune to be alone in the world?"

"Alone, Ida! Did you say alone, with your husband by your side, and your child upon your bosom?"

"But for that child, I should indeed be alone."

Elphinstone withdrew his arm from her waist, and rose from the sofa.

"Have I deserved this, Ida?" he asked, reproachfully.

Mrs. Elphinstone was silent.

"Even you, although you have ceased to love me, will perhaps afford me your pity," he pursued, greatly agitated, "when I tell you that I hastened home, full of hope and joy, with words of kindness and encouragement still sounding in my ears, to offer to you the first fruits of my professional success. The anticipation of your approval, the hope of your sympathy, made every moment of my tedious journey seem an hour until I reached my own door; the transition is a bitter one; but I do not blame you: our affections are beyond our own control, and I must submit to my fate."

"Do not add cruelty to coldness, Mr. Elphinstone," said his wife.

"Neither the one nor the other can you ever experience at my hands, Ida. I have loved you as woman is seldom

loved; I would sacrifice my life to ensure your happiness; but you wilfully misjudge me. How can I regain the affection which was once mine? Only become what you were during the first months of our marriage—tender, generous, and confiding; only let me once more be convinced that I have not forfeited your love; that our sad and unaccountable estrangement is at an end; and I shall consider no effort too great which may enable me to feel that you are again the Ida of former days.”

“Would that it indeed were in my power,” was the gloomy reply; “but we cannot deceive ourselves, Sydney; we are both changed.—Like yourself, I utter no reproach; I only yearn for a renewal of the illusion which is unhappily dissipated for ever.”

“And wherefore? If we are only true to ourselves and to each other, what more can we require for happiness?”

“Do not urge me,” said Ida, with a fresh burst of tears; “I am unhinged, and sick at heart.”

“In that at least we sympathise,” retorted her husband, as he turned away, unable to endure the sight of a grief which he could neither comprehend nor console; that his wife was suffering most acutely he could not doubt; and such was in fact the case, for jealousy is an intermittent fever which “has,” says a celebrated French author, “its paroxysms and its hours of lassitude; no patient could long endure the violence of the ague-fits which shake, chill, and agitate their victim with an universal shiver; no heart is strong enough to sustain the tension of the anger which absorbs the whole being.” And thus it was with Ida; the doubts and fears in which she had so recently indulged had prostrated her powers; and now, as she looked upon the clear frank eye and proud brow of her husband, a new trouble grew upon her; could it indeed be that she had wronged him?

She began to doubt herself; and that doubt was torture; for, if she had done so, how mean, how despicable, must she not appear in his eyes? He might profess to love her still, but *would* he do so when she had wounded him alike in his heart and in his honour?

She rose suddenly from her seat, and laying her child

upon the cushions of the sofa, she moved a few steps towards her husband with the intention of once more throwing herself at his feet, and entreating him to pardon her; but just as she approached, unconscious of her purpose, he took his hat from the table, and merely saying, "I can no longer delay apprising Lady Malcolm of the success of her cause, which I was anxious to communicate personally"—he turned, and left the room.

Once more the angel of peace folded its wings, and bowed its radiant head.

"No, I have not wronged him!" was the exclamation of Ida, as she swept back her disordered hair, and clasped her hands in passionate emotion: "he *dare* not remain to justify himself; and worse, far worse, before he has been an hour in his home—the home of his wife and child—he finds a ready excuse for hastening to reap the reward of his exertions in *her* smiles.

"Fool that I was to doubt! when he takes so little pains to conceal his falsehood, why should I torture myself by self-accusings as idle as they are ill-timed? Should I not blush at the cowardly impulse which would have carried me to his feet, to be again cajoled, and again deceived?

"Father! you are revenged. Grievously have I sinned, but grievously also do I suffer. You would have made me great; and could you only know the abject thing I am, you would forego all further vengeance—loveless, friendless, and almost homeless, your proud heiress still hangs upon the smile of a man whom her love has wearied—still clings to him, even amid her wrongs."

The demon once more triumphed. Reason was drowned beneath the waves of passion.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LAST HOPE.

HIS unfortunate reception by his wife, after his professional triumph, had wounded Elphinstone to the heart; and, consequently, at the very moment when he should have been hopeful and buoyant he became depressed and spiritless.

Why, he asked himself, should he toil, when she whose love would have made his labour light had not only ceased to interest herself in his efforts, but had even disdained to utter a single comment on his success?

To what a different result he had once looked forward! How fondly and confidently had Ida, on former days, listened to the air-built hopes which at that period he had so little power to realise; while now, when each and all were about to become real and tangible, she had withdrawn from him alike her sympathy and her encouragement.

Vain were all the congratulations poured on him by his friends, and the laudatory comments of the public press; vain were even the offers of professional employment pressed upon him, to arouse him from the settled gloom into which he had fallen; and although he pursued his legal duties with care and conscientiousness, his enthusiasm was at an end; and few could now recognise in the calm and unimpassioned Sydney Elphinstone, the brilliant and sparkling orator by whose eloquence they had so recently been startled and surprised.

His crushed heart was no longer in his task; it was buried beneath the ashes of his loveless home. Young and sanguine, he had never foreseen the possibility of a spirit-void like this; and the moral desolation withered him.

Had he possessed more strength of character, he might have replaced affection by ambition, but his nature was too yielding, and too dependent upon external support, to lead him to strive for the mere excitement of the struggle, when no helping hand was stretched forth to sustain him.

It is true that the tearful gratitude of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, and the reflection that Edith was at length in secure possession of the handsome inheritance of which she had been in danger of seeing herself defrauded, and henceforward protected from all danger of pecuniary embarrassment, afforded him deep and genuine gratification; but even this consciousness was a very inadequate compensation for the home-happiness that he had lost; while amid his present wretchedness there awoke within him a dread that Ida, the bright and beloved being whose love had once made his world, might one day urge him beyond his patience,

should she continue to indulge in the baseless suspicions and unjust accusations by which she had already tortured him.

"But no, no!" he murmured sadly to himself; "come what may, I must be guilty of no such cowardice; for me she abandoned rank, and wealth, and station, incurred the anger of her implacable father, and resigned herself to comparative poverty; she is the wife of my bosom, and the mother of my child.

"So long as she has no home save mine to shelter her, no heart save mine to bleed for her, I must bear all the misery which she may see fit to inflict upon me. I were less than man, were I to resent even the most cruel of her caprices; but should it one day chance that her father should relent, then indeed, it would become my duty to assert myself; to prove to her that I am not the abject thing she thinks me.

"Yes, even although in wringing her heart I should crush my own for ever, we should then have no alternative save to part. She has ceased to love me; obscurity and privation have done their work; and she would find consolation in the gaud and glitter which render the contrast of her present existence so bitter to her.

"Poor Ida! why did I vainly imagine that my love would compensate for all? The fault was mine; and I must expiate it as I best may."

One word of kindness, one look of tenderness from his wife at this period, would have restored Elphinstone to her, as fond and as indulgent as ever; but the word was not uttered, the look was not vouchsafed.

Ida had, after the interview which we have described, subsided into a cold and listless serenity, which admitted of no reproach, and silenced all questioning. To the well-being of her boy she was ever keenly alive, but she manifested no interest on any other subject; Sydney came and went as he listed without either inquiry or comment; she was calmly courteous when he was near her, but seemed totally careless of his absence; it was, in short, a domestic illustration of the German tale, of the dead and the living

bodies linked together, and at length, unable longer to endure the joyless existence to which he was condemned, Elphinstone, in a moment of ungovernable wretchedness, poured out all his sorrow into the sympathising bosom of Lady Malcolm, and entreated her good offices with Ida.

Hitherto he had, in so far as he was enabled to do so, locked the secret of his home-trials within his own breast, but they had gradually become too heavy to be borne alone; and as, with blanched cheeks and quivering lips, he described the daily torture to which he was subjected to the amiable woman who loved him as a son, her heart sunk within her.

True to his implied promise to his wife, Elphinstone forbore, even in his agitation, to hint at her unworthy suspicions. He well knew that Lady Malcolm would never have forgiven the insult offered to her child; and thus his listener could only recur to her original idea that Ida was causing the unhappiness of both, by a weak jealousy of some former object of her husband's affection.

"You grieve me more than I can express, Sydney," she said, when his sad confession was made; "but you must remember that, painful as your present trial cannot fail to be to you, there is never jealousy without love. Mrs. Elphinstone may probably have been told that she was not the first possessor of your heart—that you had loved before you became the slave of her own beauty—and, however we may lament that she should yield to the weakness of repining at so common a circumstance, still, as her error is solely caused by her affection, it should meet with indulgence from you."

"But I swear to you, my dear Lady Malcolm, that I never loved any woman but herself. Consider what my age was when I married! Was it probable that at twenty I should offer her an exhausted heart?"

"Age, my dear boy, has little to do with passion. Before you utter any further disclaimers, try to recall the past, and to remember if there be not some name which has, at one period or other, been linked with your own."

"Never. The thing is impossible."

"And yet, if I mistake not, I have myself heard rumours of an attachment between Lady Mary Maitland and Mr. Sydney Elphinstone?"

"How dare people so trifle with the name of a woman," exclaimed her companion, indignantly. "Lady Mary never gave me the most remote reason to suppose that she regarded me with the slightest favour; while, for myself, I looked upon her simply as a beautiful and unaffected girl, of whom I should have been proud as a sister, but never should have chosen as a wife."

"Nevertheless, as the report reached me, it may also have reached Mrs. Elphinstone."

"I am persuaded that Ida never even heard the name of Lady Mary Maitland."

"Of that fact you cannot be sure, my dear boy; and I still adhere to my opinion. That you have given your wife the slightest cause of uneasiness *since* your marriage, I am myself in a position to deny. Did I not make Mrs. Elphinstone's acquaintance while still a bride? Do I not know that up to the present day you have frequented no house but my own? that the hours which must have been devoted to a flirtation of any kind, had you been unprincipled enough to indulge in so reprehensible an amusement, have been consecrated to the interests of Edith and myself?"

Elphinstone involuntarily shrank under her frank and unsuspicious gaze.

"Thus then," she pursued, "it can only be as I have stated; and you would do well to allude to the subject; not as suspecting the cause of her present disquiet, for that could, in either case, only wound her feelings; but speak of Lady Mary openly and unaffectedly as a former acquaintance, even as a friend, if you will; and conclude by informing your wife that the young lady is about to bestow her hand upon the Marquis of Brentwood, a fact of which I have been assured."

"Such a proceeding would avail me nothing," said Elphinstone, gloomily; "Ida has never even dreamed of Lady Mary."

"You astonish me, Sydney, by your persistence in this opinion; I had hoped and believed that I had discovered,

and could have struck at, the root of the evil. But doubtlessly I have wronged your wife, by attributing to her so despicable a weakness as jealousy."

"I fear not."

"My dear boy, you are inexplicable, but I have no right to ask of you a greater amount of confidence than you are willing to repose in me. All, therefore, that I can now do, is to inquire how I may be of service to you?"

"I will tell you, my kind friend," was the agitated reply, "on you rests my only hope. See my poor self-deluded Ida; reason with her; convince her of my unchanged and unchangeable affection; describe to her the misery which she is daily and hourly inflicting on me; ask her only to hear my justification before she condemns me; urge her to hear you in the name of her boy—she still loves him! And, above all, bear with her waywardness, should she give utterance to anything which may wound you—look upon her rather as one suffering from vital disease than——"

"Enough, Sydney, enough—I will obey your bidding, my dear boy, for your dead mother's sake; although I am quite aware that **the part** which I am about to play is, at best, an invidious one; **at** any sacrifice of my own feelings, however, I will strive to restore peace between you, for your present existence is a sad waste of life, and must sooner or later become intolerable to both parties. Perhaps Mrs. Elphinstone will be more frank than yourself; should it happily prove so I am sanguine as to the results of my interference."

The excited young man seized the kind hand which was extended to him, and raised it to his lips.

"And you will bear with her, even should she——"

"Yes," interposed Lady Malcolm, with an encouraging smile, "even should she tell me, as with justice she may, that I have exceeded the privilege of a friend, by presuming to intrude my advice unasked; so be of good cheer, Sydney; I will call upon Mrs. Elphinstone early to-morrow; and I trust that before I leave her, I shall see her weeping out in your arms the happy tears of renewed confidence and affection. And now, in return for my concession, go home, and try my experiment regarding Lady Mary Maitland. I

am not yet convinced, and shall be by no means surprised if, on arriving at your house, I find my own interference altogether unnecessary."

The young man strove to return her parting smile, but it was with a sad foreboding of the failure of Lady Malcolm's attempt that he turned his steps homeward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WIFE AND THE FRIEND.

IRKSOME as Mr. Trevanion had considered his position while under the roof of his uncle, it became tenfold more so when he was again established in his own house. The peculiar circumstances of the last month had unsettled his mind for business; while the daily increasing inanity of his wife, and the selfish condescension of Lady Mary Brooklands, alike irritated him. Mrs. Trevanion, like most weak people, had a horror of mourning, and declared that her health was injured by the gloom of everything about her.

"I should not have cared, you know, Lady Mary," she whined, "if I had been called upon to wear this odious silk and crape for Mr. Trevanion, or Ida, or even for yourself; because then it would have been only right and proper; but to do it for a person I never saw in my life is a great deal too bad; just as Mademoiselle Laura had sent me three loves of caps that are now sheer waste. And the servants, too; I declare they all look like people just returned from a funeral; and as for Mr. Trevanion, it is really shocking to see how little he cares how things go on now at home."

"Mr. Trevanion has a great responsibility pressing upon him, my dear madam; and cannot, consequently, be expected to interest himself so much as formerly in the details of his establishment; which, moreover, he does me the honour to think that I can regulate with tolerable efficiency," was the sententious reply.

"I wish that poor Ida had never left us," resumed the lady of the mansion, after a brief silence; "there was something like life in the house while she was here—and I had

some one to love me then—but now, I might as well be in my grave.”

An equivocal smile played for an instant about the mouth of her companion, but it did not linger.

“Doubtlessly, we all miss Mrs. Elphinstone,” she said, “but surely, you at least have no just cause of complaint. Mr. Trevanion is a most generous husband.”

“Generous!” echoed the poor lady, with a burst of very unusual indignation, “I am sure I cannot think what meaning you attach to such a word. Do you imply that I am clothed, and fed, and lodged like a gentlewoman? I have a right to be so, for my fortune was the foundation of my husband’s. But what am I to become in my own house? Do you suppose, because I bear with the indignity in silence, I do not feel the insult of seeing a stranger take my place, and perform my duties?”

“My dear Mrs. Trevanion, you amaze me!” exclaimed Lady Mary, alarmed by this sudden and unexpected self-assertion on the part of her hitherto supine and listless companion; “in your delicate state of health would it be kind, would it be prudent, to subject you to so great a fatigue as the superintendence of an extensive establishment necessarily involves? You surely cannot be serious in thus misinterpreting the considerate kindness of Mr. Trevanion?”

“It would be no fatigue to reply if I were occasionally consulted on the arrangements of my household,” said the irritated woman, to whom anger had lent a temporary energy; “but if he did not see me from day to day, I might easily imagine that Mr. Trevanion had forgotten my existence. Surely, when my daughter was gone, I had a right to be the mistress of my own house.”

“Mrs. Trevanion,” said Lady Mary, looking up from her worsted work with an air of offended virtue, “I cannot pretend to misunderstand your inference. You are jealous of my position in the family. You shall no longer have cause to be so. I will immediately apprise Mr. Trevanion of your sentiments, and request his consent to resign a post which has for years been both delicate and difficult. He will be delighted, I do not doubt, to find that you consider yourself equal to the exertion of taking my place.”

"I am sure that I never asked you to leave us," was her terrified reply; "of course you will tell Mr. Trevanion what you please, and you well know what he will answer. I have no friend to take *my* part; no child to care for *me*, and so I must submit; but if you think that I do not feel, you are both mistaken."

Lady Mary instantly saw her advantage and pursued it.

"I had flattered myself," she said, haughtily, "that you regarded *me* as a friend, but I find that I am deceived; and that, after having devoted long and weary years to the interests of yourself and your daughter, I am still considered as a stranger. Under such circumstances, Mrs. Trevanion, I can, of course, no longer remain a guest in your house."

"You were very kind to Ida, I know," conceded her companion, sullenly.

"And of what have you yourself to complain?" was the harsh inquiry; "before we part, I should desire to ascertain upon what grounds you assume the right to censure me. Mr. Trevanion, conscious that neither his connections nor your own could introduce your daughter into the society in which he wished her to move, solicited my assistance, which I granted as frankly as it was asked. I filled your house with the *élite* of the fashionable world; I did for Ida what neither her money nor her beauty *could* have done; I enabled her to take her place among them. That she did not profit by my exertions in her behalf was assuredly no fault of mine."

"You introduced your nephew to her," exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion, with a last flash of expiring spirit.

"I presented many to her besides my nephew," was the reply of Lady Mary, as a conscious flush rose to her cheek; "but I never counselled her to marry him. On the contrary, I represented to her the folly and rashness of such a choice. Had she been my own daughter I could not have advised her more disinterestedly. But it is of yourself that I would speak rather than of your daughter. Do *you* not also owe many hours of gratification to my good offices? Have you not seen yourself surrounded by some of the greatest and noblest in the land? And have you forgotten to whom you were indebted for such a privilege? Your

husband has a better memory, and to him I shall have no cause to appeal."

"Ah, those were happy days!" murmured out the broken-spirited woman, once more crushed beneath the well-acted indignation of her haughty companion, and burying herself still deeper amid her cushions; "those were happy days!"

"I am rejoiced to find that you at least admit that fact," pursued this relentless persecutor, "as it proves that you have little cause of complaint. Those days might have been renewed, had the same good understanding continued to exist between us; but that will be impossible when I have left you. *My* friends will, as a natural consequence, resent the affront which has been offered to me; nor will it be in my power to prevent it."

"I am sure that it was not my intention to offend you," sobbed out Mrs. Trevanion, whose unaccustomed excitement had terminated in tears. You know, my dear Lady Mary, that I dare not do so, even if I wished it. Do not leave me alone with my husband: it is too late, too late—once, perhaps, I might have resented his harshness, but that time has gone by. I only wished—I only thought,—that I might have been treated with more kindness, more consideration; that I might at least have had a voice in what concerned myself; but I will never indulge in such a hope again."

"And you will do well," said her companion, as she glanced with contempt upon the weak woman whose domestic wrongs should rather have excited her sympathy; "you have not to learn to-day the peculiar disposition of Mr. Trevanion; he is proud—very proud; and should he find himself coldly treated by those who have hitherto professed to be his friends, he would bitterly resent the insult. Should I withdraw myself from his house, this would undoubtedly be the case, nor could I conceal from him that a puerile love of power on your own part had led to the annoyance."

"Decide, therefore, in how far you feel yourself able to resist his displeasure. If I go, it is because you have desired it; if I remain, it can and shall be only at your express request. That you have deeply wounded me you must

both see and feel, but for your own sake I will consent to pardon the affront, if by so doing you believe that I may avert from you the resentment of your husband."

"Oh, no, no! don't talk of leaving us," gasped out her victim; "whatever I may feel, whatever I may suffer, I will never offend you again even by a word, my dear Lady Mary."

"I will trust to that assurance; and now, listen to me a moment longer, Mrs. Trevanion. You know that your nephew is dead, and that his father will, in all probability, soon follow him to the grave. Now, I appeal to your own good sense, if even here, in your Richmond Villa, you are unequal to the exigencies of your position, how could you hope to acquit yourself of the more complicated and onerous duties which would await you at Trevanion Hall? And besides," she added, with a smile full of blandishment and meaning, "as *Lady* Trevanion, you will have ample occupation in sustaining your rank, and receiving your guests. By-the-bye, I find that the family diamonds are superb; and as *Ida* is unfortunately *hors de combat*, at least for the present, you will enjoy undisputed possession of these far-famed jewels. Is it then reasonable that you should indulge in idle repinings at imaginary wrongs when so brilliant a destiny awaits you?"

Weak and vain, however, as the poor mother was, there was yet something in the words of her companion which jured upon her feelings. She could not exult in any triumph which was obtained at the cost of her only child; and even the vision evoked by the artful Lady Mary lost its charm, as she remembered how beautiful her banished *Ida* would have looked in the diamonds which were, as she was assured, to be her own.

Little, however, did Lady Mary Brooklands care to speculate upon the hidden feelings of a mother's heart. She had accomplished her purpose; she had silenced the justifiable murmurs of the ill-used wife; she had crushed the germ of indignation in the spirit of the woman; she had, as she trusted, aroused her egotism, and dazzled her vanity; and, better still, she had secured herself against every chance of expulsion from a home, in which withota

either outlay or responsibility, she lived a life of luxury and ease which formed a delicious contrast to the existence of privation and expedients to which she must have been reduced, if once more compelled to subsist upon her very insufficient jointure.

The conviction of her present and future security acted like magic on the mood and manner of the noble matron; she listened to the puerilities of her companion with unfailing patience; affected to sympathise in all her murmurs—for despite her promises, poor Mrs. Trevanion's existence was one long murmur, which appeared to possess for her a species of negative enjoyment; and, finally, she rose from her worsted work to select from a box of books, just received from Churton's, "a charming new novel," which she recommended to her perusal.

No wonder that when Lady Mary considerably withdrew in order that she might enjoy it undisturbed, the guileless dupe felt self-convicted of injustice and want of courtesy towards the able tactician who had so skilfully terminated an interview, which, from the instant that her own point was gained, had alike wearied and disgusted her.

In ten minutes more the family friend was closeted in the library with the master of the house.

CHAPTER XLV

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

As had been constantly the case since his return to town, Mr. Trevanion was surrounded by papers and accounts, all relating to the affairs of his family, which now appeared to absorb the whole of his attention; for, although his first impulse had been one which did him honour, it must not be denied that after-reflection had induced him to regard himself, if not actually as an ill-used, at least as a very unfortunate, individual.

Had Sir Jasper borne the shock of his son's death, as he had borne that of his daughter's desertion, and been still competent to fulfil the duties of his station, it is probable that his nephew would have awaited with patience and

equanimity the period when he should himself become the representative of the family honours; but when he remembered that the baronet was, to all intents and purposes, dead to the world, though he might possibly continue for years to live on in the same imbecile and powerless condition, a feeling of irritation took possession of him which he made little or no effort to repress.

Every detail connected with the estate assumed, in his eyes, a separate importance, far greater than it really merited; the value of the ancient timber which rendered the extensive park the most picturesque and stately in the county, was calculated again and again; the massive plate, which had been the accumulation of centuries, and the Indian accessions by which it had been increased through the marriage of Sir Jasper with the nabob's widow, underwent a similar process; while not the least interesting subject of his ruminations was the banker's book, with its careful record of the heavy sums saved annually by the baronet, and destined to the establishment of his son.

Hitherto, Mr. Trevanion had looked upon money rather as a means than an end; though he had laboured assiduously for wealth, he had regarded it rather as a slave than as a master; he had valued the pomp, the luxury, and the consideration which it secured to him, and not the gold for its own sake; nay, throughout the whole of his career until the marriage of Ida, he had coveted its increase rather for her sake than for his own; and all his yearnings had been awakened by the sole ambition of achieving greatness without the aid of those who had despised him in his poverty.

Now, however, when the "bloody hand" appeared to be almost within his grasp, it was no longer the chief object of attraction, and had he been a needy man with whom the world had dealt grudgingly, he might well have been pardoned for such a feeling; while, as it was, it seemed suddenly to have changed his whole nature.

He had no sooner ascertained the enormous sum produced by his own already colossal wealth, when united to that of which he must necessarily become the owner on the demise of the baronet, than he suddenly forgot his ambition in his avarice. He even regretted the profuse expenditure in

which he had for so many years indulged, as he reflected that, having failed in his darling project of securing a noble son-in-law, so much more would have been added to the heap ; and there were moments when he almost resolved to curtail his establishment, in order to reduce the further inroads which it compelled him to make upon his treasured capital.

Never had the proud merchant been so restless and so ill at ease. Trevanion Hall, on the one hand, and the counting-house in the city on the other—his two mines of wealth—appeared to him so discordant and so incompatible that they almost, each in its turn, fretted him to fever.

He was now, actually if not legally, the head of his house ; but while the old man lived, he must continue to be Mr. Trevanion, the merchant. His commercial affairs progressed as usual, but there was, nevertheless, a moral interregnum in his existence, during which he could not mentally define his real position.

To a haughty spirit like his, the feeling that such was the case amounted to actual suffering ; and at times he would have been thankful, had intelligence reached him that his uncle had been restored to the possession of his faculties, for then he could at least have reconciled himself to pursue the career which had already raised him to opulence and honour ; but, situated as he now was, it had become distasteful to him, while he had no equivalent to replace either its excitement or its advantages.

Haughty and stern as ever, he had less self-command ; and where he would formerly have spurned support, he now yearned to secure it. He was no longer young, no longer sanguine ; he could not look beyond the present hour without disturbing himself.

Nothing had come to pass as he had foreshadowed it. The nephew, whose very name had been obnoxious to him because he stood in the way of his own greatness, was in his grave ; the daughter upon whom he had leaned with confidence as the sure agent of his ambition had failed him ; the relative whom he sought to humble was beyond the reach of worldly mortification ; and, more bitter than all else, he must consent to forego his resentment, and to ac-

knowledge the child of a penniless son-in-law as his heir, or be condemned to the exasperating consciousness that, resist as he might, he had no power to prevent that child from succeeding him as the heir of the Trevanions.

He had arrived at this phase of his reverie when Lady Mary Brooklands entered the library.

"Are you engaged, Mr. Trevanion?" she asked, in her blindest tone; "if so, I will take some future opportunity of communicating what I have to say."

"My engagements, at present," was the equally bland reply, "are by no means pressing;" and Mr. Trevanion, with his usual ceremonious politeness, rose from his seat to advance a chair for his visitor.

As he resumed his own, his eye fell on the formidable array of figures in which he had that morning inscribed his possessions *in esse* and *posse*; and it was with increased stateliness that he prepared to grant the audience solicited by his noble inmate.

Lady Mary was a peer's daughter, true; but she was as poor as she was proud; while he had wherewithal to buy up a score of peerages, should they come into the market. The time had passed when she was absolutely essential to him, but he well knew that he was as necessary to her as ever. He had purchased her services, and could still pay their price; there was no feeling of obligation on either side; while constant association had enabled them to comprehend each other perfectly.

Lady Mary inwardly sneered at the man of money who aspired at greatness; while the merchant, on his side, despised the great lady who sacrificed her dignity to her interests. Still, nothing could exceed the urbanity and good breeding with which both played their part in the domestic drama. If there was neither confidence, friendship, nor regard between them, there was the strong tie of mutual necessity. Each was essential to the other, and each was conscious that such was the case.

Thus, even when Mr. Trevanion, with a keenness of perception rendered still more acute by distrust—for, from the moment Ida became the wife of Sydney Elphinstone, he *had*

distrusted Lady Mary—perceived, or fancied he perceived, that the tortuous talent of the titled widow was about to be exhibited in some new and skilful manœuvre, not a look or a gesture was ever suffered to betray such a suspicion; nor did he, when he occasionally contrived, with apparent unconsciousness, to baffle her endeavour, permit her to imagine that he was aware of having done so.

Nevertheless, he was constantly upon his guard against a surprise; and it was, consequently, with a misgiving of some fresh design upon his purse or his pride that he, on the present occasion, assumed an attitude of profound and earnest attention.

Nor was he far wrong in his anticipations, for, after having so cleverly protested against the indignant interference of the wife, the astute matron resolved to render her position equally secure with the husband.

Skilfully as she had striven to ascertain the intentions of Mr. Trevanion, on his accession to the baronetcy, she had been unable to effect her purpose. Had she succeeded in inducing him to confide to her his decision regarding his daughter, her own future fate would have been clearly mapped out before her; for should he resolve to recall his long-banished child, now a wife and a mother, Mrs. Elphinstone must necessarily do the honours of Trevanion Hall, and, with her high spirit, would brook no interference from herself; in which case, she must either forego the well-appreciated advantages of her present home, or consent to subside into insignificance; whereas, should the offended father persevere in his resentment, her own reign was secured.

It was to satisfy herself of this important point that she now intruded on the solitude of the merchant, but she was by far too able a tactician to put the question directly.

“My reason for wishing to see you at this particular moment, Mr. Trevanion,” she commenced, “was to inform you that I have just had a somewhat important conversation with your wife. As it is extremely probable that your uncle, Sir Jasper, cannot long survive, and as his death will occasion great and extensive alterations in your domestic

arrangements, I thought it desirable to ascertain the wishes and intentions of Mrs. Trevanion, when the event should occur——”

“A work of supererogation, madam, which could tend to no result.”

“Perhaps so; but, aware as I am of the peculiar constitution of Mrs. Trevanion’s mind, I thought it very possible that when once she had become Lady Trevanion, she would consider herself aggrieved should I continue to exercise the same authority under your roof as you have hitherto delegated to me; and, therefore, I resolved to have a clear and perfect understanding with herself upon the subject.”

“And did you succeed?” inquired her listener, with a sneer.

“Perfectly.”

“Then, my Lady Mary, you have worked a miracle which, throughout the whole of my married life, I have been unable to accomplish.”

“I was prepared,” pursued his companion, “should my poor friend evince the slightest desire to assume her duties as mistress of the house in her new home, to abdicate my throne at once; and, with that view, I had already written to my cousin, the Dowager Duchess of Clanmore, who is a widow like myself, to propose that we should combine our forces, and establish a joint household.”

“And what did her grace reply?” inquired the merchant, with most alarming composure.

“I am still awaiting her answer,” said the discomfited Lady Mary, striving to conceal her uneasiness; “but there can be little doubt as to its purport, since she made the same request to me before I became your guest.”

“That arrangement, then, is still in abeyance; but you will perhaps be kind enough to acquaint me how Mrs. Trevanion received your proposition.”

“She refused to hear of my leaving her—she even shed tears—and I assure you, my dear Mr. Trevanion, that I bitterly reproached myself for having occasionally imagined that she misinterpreted my feelings and intentions.”

“Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject, Lady Mary; Mrs. Trevanion’s imaginary annoyances may always

be removed by a new dress or a new novel. For once, however, she acted with common sense ; but you must pardon me if I venture to remark that it would have been more in accordance with your usual good judgment had you consulted me rather than my wife. However, I have no doubt that you were impelled by a sense of delicacy to act as you did ; and you are, at all events, a free agent. Thus, then, I am to understand that, before you decide upon your future plans, you will await the reply of your cousin the duchess."

"Why, not precisely——" commenced the noble matron, with an eagerness which she immediately endeavoured to restrain ; "of course, so far as my residence with her is concerned, I shall be compelled to do so ; but I am half inclined to visit Scotland under any circumstances."

"I had flattered myself that you would have felt some curiosity to see my ancestral home," remarked Mr. Trevanion, with even more than his usual stateliness ; "and, indeed, I looked forward to the advantage of your good taste and judgment in the alterations and improvements which I shall find it necessary to make there. My uncle has, since the death of his wife, lived a very retired life, and suffered the Hall to remain in precisely the same state in which I remember it in my boyhood ; I discovered no symptom of decided neglect or decay on my late visit, certainly ; but still much is required to render it what I should desire.

"Both the Hall and the adjacent estate have great capabilities, very great capabilities, and I have resolved, when they once come into my possession, to develope them to their utmost extent. Sir Jasper, as I soon ascertained, had been anxious rather to save money than to spend it ; and he was right. He had a son to inherit the property ; I am differently situated ; and, moreover, while he was known to all the county, I shall enter it as a stranger, and must consequently be cautious not to allow the local dignity of the family to suffer in my hands.

"This place is, as you are aware, Mrs. Trevanion's jointure-house, and enough, more than enough, has already been expended upon it ; indeed, to be candid with you,

I almost repent that I have been tempted to do so much. However, when I establish myself at the Hall, it will probably let more advantageously in consequence than it might otherwise have done.

"As to the house in town, for the present at least, it will answer every purpose, as I shall decidedly reside in the country until I have completed all my plans."

Lady Mary bowed and smiled, and tacitly signified her acquiescence in the propriety of these somewhat premature projects; but still, as she could not conceal from herself, she was no nearer her own point than ever.

"Mrs. Trevanion appears to be most anxious that you should consent to a reconciliation with your daughter at this particular crisis," she hazarded, in order to arrive at some conclusion.

"Mrs. Trevanion is very good; and she must surely have become aware long ere this, that as I can place no reliance on her judgment on any serious emergency, I cannot be expected to suffer her wants or wishes to control me in any way. 'This particular crisis' offers no reason, that I can perceive, for a precipitate measure of the sort. Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone quitted my roof at her own good pleasure, but she must return to it only at mine; and when, if ever, I may decide on again receiving her, is entirely a matter for my own consideration."

"Yet surely," remarked the lady, making another desperate plunge to clutch the truth which lay deep beneath the waves of the merchant's resolute reserve, "it will be a most unpleasant thing for you to feel that your heir is a stranger to you! Of course, Ida must be naturally anxious that her boy should be reared and educated in such a manner as you would approve."

"I really do not see why Mrs. Elphinstone should be more punctilious with regard to her son's conduct than her own. On the contrary, she is, no doubt, perfectly aware that he will ultimately be more independent of my displeasure than she could ever be; and I feel no present inclination to interfere with her peculiar system of education."

"But you cannot, nevertheless, shut your eyes to the fact, my good sir, that your daughter does not possess the

means necessary to carry out any such system in an efficient manner ; and surely——”

“ You are a zealous friend, Lady Mary, and your niece will, beyond all doubt, be grateful for your good offices ; but still, it appears to me, that you overrate the privations to which she has thought proper to expose herself. You should remember that she possesses an income of four hundred a year (about as much as she expended upon her dress before her marriage), and that Mr. Sydney Elphinstone is declared to be a very rising young man ; fame brings profit, my dear madam, in every profession ; and thus you see that you alarm yourself unnecessarily, and that the young gentleman, regarding whose future career you express so very flattering an anxiety, will need no patronage of mine.”

“ Still, as the heir to the Trevanion estate——”

“ I yet stand in his way,” said the merchant, drily, “ and may probably do so for many years to come ; added to which, although Sir Jasper is *hors de combat* in all matters of business, he is nevertheless still alive ; and for any reason which I can see to the contrary, now that his mind can no longer act upon his physical health, he may survive for twenty years to come.”

“ You cannot be serious, Mr. Trevanion.”

“ I am perfectly so.”

“ I regret to hear it, as, according to my own view of the case, you would be wise in so ordering your arrangements as to be prepared at any moment to supply his place.”

“ I flatter myself, Lady Mary, that I should have been quite competent to do so at an hour’s warning, at any period during the last thirty years. But, my dear madam, I have myself known invalids in his condition outlive their natural heirs ; and who shall say that my uncle may not augment the number ?”

His listener was fairly baffled, but, indignant at the idea of defeat, she returned once more to the charge.

“ I am to understand, then, Mr. Trevanion, that, in the remote contingency of Sir Jasper’s death, you are anxious that I should accompany the family to Trevanion Hall ?”

"Certainly, my dear Lady Mary. Can you doubt that you will ever be a welcome guest beneath my roof?"

"I hope not," said the lady, beginning to chafe under the consciousness that she was checkmated at every move; "but my inquiry embraces a wider scope than you appear inclined to concede to it. As I have already stated, I have been entreated, even with tears, by Mrs. Trevanion, not to abandon her to the heavy and irksome responsibilities which must devolve upon the mistress of such an establishment as that which you contemplate in ——shire

"Of course," she pursued, with a significant smile, "I have not to learn to-day that she can make no independent arrangement of so serious a nature without your sanction; and it is consequently to you that I appeal before I conclude my own plans."

"I trust, my dear madam, that you have not wearied of my house; I should indeed be sorry to find that such were the case."

"No, no; do not mistake me. The fact is, that, as I take a totally different view of the baronet's malady from yourself, I look daily for news of his death; and, since you compel me to speak frankly, I should like to be informed whether, when it has taken place, you have any intention of recalling your daughter, and establishing her at the head of your household; as, in the event of such an arrangement, I must of course decline a further residence beneath your roof. Ida is no longer a mere girl, and she would naturally——"

"When I have given Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone a right to dictate her own terms, I shall be prepared to consider them," was the imperturbable reply. "At present I am content to wait the demise of my uncle before I decide on my after-plans. Meanwhile, I feel much indebted to you, my dear Lady Mary, for the consideration which you have shown to the wishes of Mrs. Trevanion. No doubt she is appalled by the prospect before her; she would be equally so by a far less important event; and I shall feel still further obliged, if you will tranquillise her mind upon the subject, and assure her from me that, in any and every case, I shall be careful that she is not exposed to any extra care

or exertion. I trouble you with this mission, because, after the interest which you have so kindly evinced in her very unnecessary anxiety, I feel satisfied that you will derive gratification from performing so friendly an office."

Lady Mary Brooklands rose; she could endure no more; the calm self-possession of her companion made the blood tingle in her veins; but she was one of those wary individuals who live not only *in* the world, but *on* it; she could not afford to be true to herself; and, accordingly, she repressed the haughty rejoinder which trembled upon her lips; and, after a few inconsequent remarks, left the library, as ignorant of the real intentions of its master as when she had entered it.

Nevertheless, when she once more found herself alone in her own pretty morning-room, with its costly store of rare china, buhl, marqueterie, and bronze, she soon succeeded in convincing herself that the designs of Mr. Trevanion were more transparent than he imagined; and that it behoved her to be careful of her own interests.

"Had he resolved"—thus she mentally argued—"to exclude Ida from her home during his lifetime, he would have evinced more anxiety to prevent me from carrying out my assumed arrangement with the Duchess of Clanmore; as the idea of his placing at the head of his house in——shire a woman of whom he is ashamed even here, is preposterous. Crafty as he has been, he has not succeeded in deceiving me; and now my only chance of averting the mortifying change of fortune by which I am threatened, exists in an immediate reconciliation with Ida. How do I regret that, in obedience to her father's request, I did not reply to the letters which she addressed to me after her marriage! However, *le passé est passé*, and I must endeavour to retrieve my fault. I will write to her at once."

And, seating herself at the antique *secretaire*, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and malachite, which occupied the bay of the window, twenty minutes had not elapsed before she had crossed the first page of her paper with expressions of affection, regret, and remorse, as intense as though she had been the cause of Mrs. Elphinstone's disgrace, and had been plotting to rob her son of his birthright.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN EXPLANATION.

IN compliance with the advice of Lady Malcolm, Elphinstone, on his return home, affecting to be blind to the coldness and indifference of his wife, resolutely commenced a conversation, to which she contributed nothing beyond an occasional monosyllable; nor could even his account of the trial, and the formidable ordeal through which he had so successfully passed, elicit from her any demonstration of excitement or gratified pride.

Nevertheless, he persisted in his ungracious task, until her suppressed emotion became too powerful for concealment, and the heart of Sydney began to swell with hope.

"You do feel for me and with me, Ida," he said, tenderly, as she turned away to hide the tears which had forced their way from her downcast eyes; "I am sure you do, although, for some inexplicable cause, you are anxious to suppress those feelings. Oh! do not at this moment, when I am harassed both in mind and body, deny to me the blessings of your sympathy."

"Why will you persist in urging me to feign what I cannot feel?" asked his wife, struggling to regain her self-possession; "how can I sympathise in a triumph with which I am totally unconnected? It is for Lady Malcolm and her daughter, in whose cause you exerted the talents which, when their exhibition could only have profited your wife and child, you suffered to lie dormant, to congratulate you on their success."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband, reproachfully, "you are unjust. You well know how long I had been yearning for an opportunity of usefulness, and that until the day when I was entrusted with this cause, which will, as I trust, prove the corner-stone of my professional reputation, I had been unable to secure one. Surely you would not visit it upon

me as a crime that my first efforts were exerted in the behalf of my mother's dearest friend?"

"By no means; and in the acknowledgments of that friend you will have your best reward. It is the consciousness of that fact which closes my own lips."

"But can you imagine for a moment that anything can compensate to me for your own cold indifference?"

"Do not deceive yourself, Sydney," was the measured reply; "for you cannot deceive me. Had this famous trial, which has so suddenly lifted you from obscurity to fame, involved the interests of any other individual than Edith Malcolm, I consider it very problematical if you would have exhibited the same amount of energy."

"Again, Ida?"

"Can you deny the fact?"

"Yes, and no. In any and every case I should have felt it my duty to put forth all my strength; but I do not seek to deny that I should have felt much less anxiety as to the result."

"For once you are frank!"

"For once! Have you ever found me otherwise? Listen to me, Ida: high-minded, pure-hearted, and capable, as I well know, of any sacrifice for those you love, you are nevertheless destroying our mutual happiness by a phantom which you have yourself evoked. Once more, despite your pledge to the contrary, you are indulging in inferences as unjust to myself as they are injurious to the innocent girl, for whom I have never felt more than the regard and affection of a brother. Can you not rely upon my plighted word? And have you forgotten that she was the promised bride of your poor cousin?"

"A fable," said Mrs. Elphinstone, scornfully; "a bridegroom with the hand of death already pressing upon his heart!—a bride who scarcely vouchsafed to shed a tear over his untimely grave! The game was ill-played, and could not deceive the lookers-on."

"Can it be possible, Ida, that you still persist in so fatal a delusion? Have you no respect for the father of your child?—no regard for the honour of your own sex? If it, indeed, be so; if you blindly indulge in a weakness

which neither assurances nor proofs can overcome, what a life of misery is before us both !”

“The assurances have not been wanting,” said his wife, gloomily ; “but where are the proofs ?”

“They exist in the fact that, aware of your suspicions, I have not for months frequented the house of Lady Malcolm, save on professional business ; and that I voluntarily offered to effect a total estrangement between the two families.”

“By exposing me and my wretchedness to the contempt of those who had caused it.”

“Ida, do not drive me to extremity !” exclaimed her husband ; “from you I can bear, I have borne, much—but all endurance has its limits. I cannot long support an existence so cruel as this to which you have condemned me. While I believed that your jealousy was the result of an affection which would not brook less than an adequate return, I strove by every means in my power to prove how much you wronged me ; but now, when I see and feel that I am no longer the object of either love or confidence, I have not self-command enough to endure the daily and hourly trials to which I am subjected.”

“And do I escape my share of suffering ?”

“Unfortunately you do not. Would that it were otherwise !”

“We have committed a fatal error, Sydney,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, suddenly ; “or rather it is I who have been guilty of one. In my wretched egotism, believing that I could and should suffice to make your happiness, I urged you to abandon the world, that we might live only for each other. I overtaxed your affection ; I calculated too blindly on your stability ; putting firm faith in the assurances which you had given me that when once I became your wife your existence would be bound up in mine, I thought myself secure. What the result of my confidence has been, I need not say : suffice it that we are both most wretched ! You affirm that you can no longer support such an existence ; judge, then, how little I shall be able to endure it. I never deceived you, Sydney ; I warned you, when you sought my hand, that if ever I had *proof* of your falsehood, I should hate as deeply as I had ever loved. I say so still ; but,

until I have that proof, I will struggle on for my child's sake—aye, even for my own—for what have I now left on earth to cling to but yourself?”

Exhausted by her own emotion, Ida sank back upon her chair, and buried her face in her hands, while hot tears forced their way through her trembling fingers. In an instant, Elphinstone was at her side.

“And I—I,” he murmured, convulsively, “I have none but you. Why will you close your heart against me?”

With a wild gesture, his wife flung her arms about his neck.

“Precisely as I anticipated!” said a voice, which proceeded from the unclosed door that opened upon the lawn, and Lady Malcolm, with a beaming smile and extended hand, advanced eagerly towards them.

In an instant Mrs. Elphinstone stood erect; no trace of tears could be detected in her flashing eyes, although they still lingered on her cheeks: proudly, and even defyingly, she returned the animated glance which was fastened on her; and while Sydney grasped, with warmth and fervour, the proffered hand, his wife remained cold and motionless.

“Did I not tell you that one word would suffice to explain all?” asked their visitor, cheerfully; “and now that word has been spoken, you see the happy effect which it has produced.”

“Will you do me the favour to interpret your meaning, Lady Malcolm?” asked Ida, haughtily; “for you must pardon me if I confess myself unable to comprehend either the purport of your words, or the reason of this somewhat extraordinary intrusion on the privacy of my home.”

“Will you not excuse its want of ceremony in the earnestness of its motive, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone? With considerable difficulty I succeeded in convincing your husband that your late unhappiness had arisen solely from your uneasiness on the subject of a certain Lady Mary Maitland, and that, consequently, when he informed you that she was about to become Marchioness of Brentwood, you would at once appreciate at its real value the idle gossip of a few tattling women.”

Mrs. Elphinstone glanced towards her husband for an

instant, and a sarcastic expression passed over her features as she replied, "You are very kind, madam, to interest your self so warmly in our domestic happiness, but, unfortunately, I am too clear-sighted to become your dupe. Until this moment I never heard even the name of the lady to whom it would appear that Mr. Elphinstone was so much devoted, as to render it a matter of congratulation to me that she is about to become a wife. *This* was a piece of intelligence which I had yet to learn, and I thank you for the information, tardy as it is."

"Mrs. Elphinstone, what would your manner to me imply? You know how sincere an affection I feel, and have ever felt, for your husband, but even his wife may presume too far upon it."

"Oh, I can incur the threatened risk without shrinking," said Ida, with a mocking laugh. "It is really time that we should understand each other; and I can but admire the frankness with which Lady Malcolm acknowledged an affection in which her daughter so cordially unites."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband, imploringly.

"Suffer Mrs. Elphinstone to explain herself, Sydney," said their visitor, with calm dignity; "if I mistake not there was an allusion made to Edith—to Miss Malcolm, which requires explanation, and I demand it here and now."

"You shall have it, madam," said the infatuated woman, as she drew herself proudly up and confronted the pale and stately matron. "If I was not aware, until you obliged me by the information, that at the very time when Mr. Elphinstone (no doubt supposing that I must ultimately become the heiress of the wealthy Mr. Trevanion) induced me to believe that I was the only woman he had ever loved, he had so far committed himself in another quarter, as to have become the theme of idle tongues, and subjected a lady to the same mortification, I feel little disposed at the present day to resent the indignity which he then offered to me."

"I do not even seek or care to know whether on that occasion he played the flattering part of a rejected suitor; or, weighing the lady's reputed wealth with my own, conceived that the scale turned in my favour; if the former was the case, his own feelings must have been a sufficient

punishment; if the latter, I am now taught to exult in a firmness on the part of my father, which I had hitherto regarded as cruelty.

"Thus, then, I trust you will perceive that, although the knowledge of Mr. Elphinstone's former attachment by no means tends to exalt my opinion of either his stability or his good faith, it cannot otherwise affect my happiness. I am no child to fight with shadows. And now, as you request it, I will explain my reference to Miss Malcolm. I confess, that to myself it appears wholly unnecessary that I should do so, but since you request it——"

"I do not request, I demand it."

"Ida!" once more exclaimed her husband, in violent agitation.

Mrs. Elphinstone disregarded an appeal, of which she even appeared to be unconscious; and coldly pursued:

"You found us happy, Lady Malcolm. When you first crossed our path we were, or I believed that we were, everything to each other; not a cloud had come between us; and what has been the result of our acquaintance?"

With a groan wrung from his very heart, Sydney flung himself on the sofa, and buried his face among the cushions. He could not bear to meet the eyes of the admirable woman and unfailing friend, who was about for his sake to be subjected to the most cruel insults that could be offered to a mother.

"The result!" echoed Lady Malcolm, in a tone of undisguised amazement.

"The result, madam: you have a daughter younger than myself, perhaps handsomer—I am too proud, or perhaps, under existing circumstances, too careless, to contest that point. I welcomed her to my home, where she has gradually supplanted me. She has been my husband's chosen companion; she consoled him by her society when, by giving birth to his child, I was condemned to the irksomeness of a sick-room; her accomplishments have administered to his amusements; her attentions have soothed his vanity; and finally, when the welfare of those who were dependent on him failed to arouse him into energy and action, she discovered the secret of awakening both, by enlisting them in her

service. And you demand to know my meaning, Lady Malcolm! You, who have looked calmly on, and suffered the affections of my husband to be wrenched from me, day by day, by the wiles of an artful girl."

"No more, Ida—no more!" exclaimed her husband, suddenly springing up. "You cannot understand the bearing of your words; you cannot mean to imply to the mother of Edith——"

"I imply nothing, Mr. Elphinstone, and I am fully and painfully aware of my own meaning. I have endured much, and long; but all human endurance has its limits."

Lady Malcolm had turned away, but the violence of her emotion could be detected in the convulsive shiver by which her whole frame was agitated. Twice she strove to speak, but the words died away upon her lips; and her heart throbbed visibly beneath the pressure of the hand with which she strove in vain to control its beatings.

"Sydney," she said, at length, in a hoarse whisper, "I forgive your wife for your mother's sake—I can do no more. My pure, innocent child! My poor Edith! Who shall escape the tongue of slander, the taint of suspicion, since she has become their victim? Farewell, Sydney, we must meet no more on this earth. Would that our final parting had been less bitter!"

"Not so, Lady Malcolm, not so," said Elphinstone, sternly, as he retained his grasp of the hand which she had extended to him. "My wife has truly said, that 'all human endurance has its limits,' and I have been forced beyond the boundary of mine. I will *not* consent that this meeting shall be our final one; I will *not* consent to be abandoned by my best and oldest friend at the bidding of a woman, who, in the indulgence of a weak and vicious passion, has forfeited at once her own dignity and the respect of her husband. I thank you that you have not attempted to vindicate your pure and injured daughter, and, by so doing, cast a doubt on my own honour. Mrs. Elphinstone is, happily for us both, possessed of an income which will enable her to quit a home in which she declares herself to have been deceived, neglected, and dishonoured; nor shall I ever cease to remember that she is the mother of my child, should I

have it in my power to add to her worldly comfort and respectability.

"In becoming my wife she made great and undeniable sacrifices, which I have endeavoured to repay by a forbearance that has at last rendered me contemptible in my own eyes. I have deserved the indignities which have been heaped upon me; but I will now assert myself.

"Violating, as Mrs. Elphinstone has done, every principle of delicacy, she shall not have cause to reproach me with a want of generosity in my turn. I am a father; and how I have loved our boy she well knows; but I will spare her the pang which I inflict upon myself; I will not rob her of her child. She will, at least, have one being left to love, while I—I——"

"Sydney!" gasped his wife, as she approached him. "Do I understand you rightly? Do you sacrifice me and your child to those who have brought this misery upon me?"

"I ask you to make no sacrifice," was the cold reply, "I leave you free, while securing my own immunity from further insult."

"Sydney," said Lady Malcolm, in her turn, "beware of forming a rash and hasty resolution. That you have been wronged is true, but you love your wife, and must not, without mature reflection, destroy the happiness of two lives."

"Doubtlessly, madam," remarked Ida, bitterly, "what Mr. Elphinstone refuses to an injured wife, he would concede to your entreaties. I, however, decline to owe anything to the intercession of the individual——"

"Ida," interposed her husband, "let it suffice that you have hitherto been enabled to insult me with impunity; I will not suffer you to carry your madness further. If the dignity and honour of your husband are of so little importance in your eyes that you can afford to sacrifice them to your insane and unfounded suspicions, I warn you that I shall not attempt to reciprocate the injury, but will part from you without noise or scandal; venture, however, to utter but one word affecting the reputation of those to whom you are indebted for a friendship which you have requited with the most gratuitous ingratitude, and I shall prove less for-

bearing. The law shall then separate us, and the world shall judge between us."

"Yet once more let me entreat—" commenced Lady Malcolm, earnestly.

"It is useless, madam," said Ida, with a calm more frightful than the wildest passion; "the question has been decided. I prefer the beggary to which Mr. Elphinstone has condemned me, to any association with those whom I can neither regard nor respect, and whose very presence is irksome to me. Permit me, however, before you leave us, to assure you that I am not the victim you would fain have made me. I warned my husband before I gave him my hand, that mine was not a heart which could be trampled on with impunity. I warned him that mine was no cold and common nature, which could be stung, and requite the venom with a smile. Believe me when I say—for I say it advisedly—that I can hate as deeply as I have loved; that where I have been injured I can requite. Do not picture me to yourself, or paint me to your daughter, as crushed by the fate to which you have mutually hurried me. The blow will fall more heavily upon my husband than upon myself. He abandons me to the comments of the world—I leave him to the reproaches of his own conscience."

Lady Malcolm offered no reply, but, after wringing the hand of Sydney, walked slowly from the room, and the husband and wife were alone together

CHAPTER XLVII.

A FIRST SEPARATION.

ON the departure of Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Elphinstone had, in her turn, advanced to the door of the apartment, firmly and haughtily, but with a slow and measured step, which would, had he been inclined to do so, have afforded ample time to her husband to detain her.

Mr. Elphinstone, however, evinced no desire to control her movements. He was following Lady Malcolm with his eyes as she traversed the garden ; nor did he move from the window, until she had disappeared through the door of communication which opened upon her own grounds ; and when he at length changed his position, his wife had left the room.

For a moment the young husband looked around him, like one bewildered by a sudden blow. Even the accustomed objects by which he was surrounded appeared strange and unfamiliar. There was an expression of keen suffering upon his features, and a tremulousness in his manner, which betrayed how deeply he had been moved ; but his eye was tearless as he raised his hat from the table, and, ringing for a servant, desired that Mrs. Elphinstone might be informed he should not return home that night, and that, consequently, it would be unnecessary to detain the dinner.

Poor Sydney ! The illusions of life were over for him ; and he felt that henceforward he must pursue his path alone. For hours he wandered through the lanes where he had so often loitered with Ida ; nor was it until the declining sun warned him that he had still to seek a home, that he reluctantly turned once more into the busy thoroughfare which led towards town.

His reflections had been very bitter ones, but his conscience acquitted him of wrong ; and while he remembered, with the sad yearning of regret, all that his wife had once

been to him—his elegant, though modest home—his beautiful and only child—his very heart seemed bursting within him. But his resolution was not shaken even for an instant. His wounded affections might, and did, rebel; but the pride of outraged manhood gave him strength to resist their pleadings.

Still it was with a melancholy feeling of isolation that he at length reached the Temple, which he had resolved should be his future home, and gave the necessary instructions to his amazed but unquestioning clerk.

“My profession must henceforth be wife, and child, and world to me,” he murmured to himself, as he sank into one of the unwieldy chairs by which his private office was encumbered. “I must forget the past, and strive to suffice to myself. I will endeavour to evoke ambition from the ashes of outraged affection. I cannot be happy, but I may yet be true to myself.”

It was a bold vaunt; but, even as he uttered it, he felt its emptiness, and, after a sharp struggle with feelings which he vainly stigmatised as weak and womanly, he bent his head upon the desk before him, and wept bitterly.

He was alone; and no prying eye could note his tears. For a while this conviction gave him a sense of relief, which was almost happiness; but soon the consciousness returned to him that thus he must ever be; that, alike in grief or toil, he must remain companionless—uncheered by the sympathy of home; that, husband and father though he was, the tenderness of a wife, the love of a child, would no longer make his labour light, or his success a triumph.

And he was still so young! So full of the best and holiest impulses of life! To what long and weary years of existence might he not be condemned? The reflections startled him. No! the life of study and intellectual struggle, upon which he had decided so prematurely, would not suffice to blot out the bitter memories of the past. He could not breathe the same air, nor exist in the same hemisphere, with the woman he had so dearly loved—the child upon whom he had built up so many hopes.

“I will labour on until I have ensured their comfort and well-being,” was his next resolve. “I will restore to

her, by my exertions, the affluence which, for my sake, she abandoned; my boy shall cease to be a beggar; and then, when I have secured my name from reproach, the world will be before me, and I will hew out my own path unflinchingly."

The darkness grew dense about him; every object in the vast and dreary room became dim and indistinct; and the deep silence of the ancient pile was rendered still more oppressive by the hollow reverberations from the busy streets beyond.

The tide of feeling rushed back upon him. The past, with all its hopes and all its affections, rose on his memory with mocking brilliancy; and with lingering tenderness he lived over again the few brief months of happiness and love that he had passed with Ida.

"Is it firmness or cowardice which has impelled me to the extreme step that I have now taken?" he asked himself. "Is it not my duty to endure all, until I have secured the competence which is now mine only in perspective, and which may even fail me yet? Dare I abandon the woman who, in the unselfish confidence of a trusting heart, gave herself to me in my poverty and obscurity, when she might have become the wife of one who could have surrounded her with all the luxuries of life?"

"In seeking to assert myself, I have been alike ungenerous and unjust; but it is not yet too late to repair my fault. She cannot mistake my motive, if I tell her frankly the decision at which I have arrived. To-morrow, then—to-morrow I will once more return to that home which I believed that I had abandoned for ever. I will strive to remember all that she once was to me, and forget that which she now is. I will support my wrongs in silence until I can liberate both her and myself with honour.

"It is bitter, very bitter; but it must be borne. She does not comprehend how I have loved, how I still love her, and it is better so; she will have one regret the less when the hour of separation at length comes. Yes, I feel that I have decided rightly. She is too young, too beautiful, to be abandoned to a hollow and cold-hearted world

until she possesses the means of compelling its respect. I have—I ought to have no alternative—and I will meet my fate courageously, cruel as it is.”

As the unhappy young man arrived at this determination, he rang for lights, which were no sooner placed before him, than with nervous rapidity he unscaled and read the letters which lay upon his table; and for a brief moment a smile of exultation played about his lips. There was work before him; not assistance coldly and grudgingly tendered, but opportunities of usefulness pressed cordially and flatteringly upon him. His heart might be silenced for ever, but his intellect was about to be called into full exercise; and henceforth he must live for fame, and forget his private sorrows in his public duties.

In the excitement of the moment he seized his pen, and far into the night, alone, fasting, and heart-crushed, he laboured on.

His solitude was uninvaded, his wants unheeded. He was alone with his vanished visions, his blighted hopes, his withered trust; nor was it until the cold gray dawn stole with its dreary gleam into the room, that he at length flung himself upon a sofa, and fell into a deep and comfortless sleep.

And how had Ida—she who had wilfully wrecked her own happiness and that of a husband whom she loved with all the passionate ardour of her ill-governed nature—how had she passed the night in which she had become worse than widowed? At times on her knees beside the cradle of her child, weeping such tears as leave their trace for ever upon the heart from which they flow—upbraiding herself, her destiny—regretting the past—shrinking from the future—and listening with a beating heart for the returning step of him whom she had outraged. At times pacing the room with rapid and unequal steps, braving the fate which her own folly had brought upon her, and striving to believe that she no longer loved him.

As the night wore on, and the clock of a neighbouring church pealed out the hour of midnight, however, all the false energy by which she had hitherto been sustained, forsook her. Never, until the moment in which she at length

despaired of his return, had she been fully conscious how necessary Sydney was to her existence. Even her child was forgotten in the utter despair which took possession of her. The very firmness with which he had brought this wretchedness upon her compelled her respect; and for awhile she cowered beneath the conviction of his unsuspected strength of character. This prostration of spirit was, however, only temporary.

"Be it so," she murmured to herself, "the contest will no longer be an unequal one; in bruising my heart, he will crush his own; for even while he betrayed me, I feel that he loved me still. I have no longer a home—scarcely a name—and yet I will defy the fate to which he has condemned me. Time will prove who can best bear up against the trial.

"But, no, no! that seeming strength could have been but momentary. Sydney, you have deceived yourself; it is not I who am destined to be the victim: you cannot, you dare not, abandon both wife and child, and brave the world without sympathy or support. No, I feel and know that you will yet return to my feet a suppliant; but it shall be too late, even did you sue to me this very hour. You abandon me to poverty; I accept it, for you will have condemned yourself to an existence far more wretched; and while the world may sympathise in my privations, you shall never know the keener pangs that you have inflicted on my heart.

"Aye," she pursued, still more bitterly, "the moment in which you have thrust me forth to struggle with that world has been well chosen. Your path is smooth before you; you have felt the intoxicating consciousness of success—the future is bright in its promise; and it is now—now—that you assume the semblance of a power which I defy.

"Were I still the spoiled and pampered heiress, I could forgive you; for then indeed I could, without humiliation, welcome you back to my heart, and struggle to forget the past;—I shall be very wretched, but I, too, can be firm; there have been martyrs who have smiled at the stake; and I, like them, will endure my martyrdom without complaint, proudly conscious that I shall not suffer alone."

Day broke; the busy hum of men rose on the air; the sorrowing, who had for a few brief hours forgotten their cares in sleep, awoke to renewed grief; the happy sprang from their beds, exulting in a new season of enjoyment; and ere the sun had long been above the horizon, Sydney Elphinstone, true to his purpose of the previous night, was already on his way, self-accusing and self-rebuked, to his now cheerless home.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOME.

"At last!" murmured Ida to herself, as from the window of her dressing-room, which she had flung open in order to cool her aching brow in the fresh morning air, she saw her husband pass the gate of the lawn, and approach the house: "I knew that it must be so; a few short hours have sufficed to show him that he overrated his own strength; this is as I would have it;—I shall not be the forsaken wife, thrust forth from the hearth and heart of the man on whose truth and loyalty she had relied; but the indignant and self-avenging woman, who has energy enough to revenge her own wrongs!"

As she thus communed with her own thoughts, she hastily bound up her hair, bathed her swollen eyes with cold water, and arranged her dress, which, in the irritation of a long and sleepless night, had become disordered.

As the Indian suttee decorates herself with the most costly jewels ere she prepares to ascend the funeral pyre of her husband, so did Mrs. Elphinstone, strong in her resolution to resist the pleadings of Sydney, and to inflict on him a pang which must, nevertheless, as she was painfully conscious, recoil upon herself, stand calmly before her glass, and endeavour with fastidious care to obliterate every vestige of the suffering through which she had just passed, ere she doomed herself to life-long misery by rejecting all overtures to a reconciliation which might yet have saved them both.

Slowly, and with an unruffled brow, she ultimately descended to the breakfast-room; and there, as she had anticipated, she found her husband—not calm and collected like herself—but evidently labouring under an agitation by which he was thoroughly unnerved.

As she entered the apartment, he turned abruptly towards her, and extended his hand; but the action was unheeded by his wife, who, uttering a cold and brief "good morning," prepared to lay her own hand upon the bell.

"Hear me, Ida," he said, eagerly, as he intercepted the movement; "before our solitude is invaded by the entrance of a servant, let me tell you that I have recognised my fault; wounded pride and the resentment of a heart smitten in its best affections hurried me into a harshness foreign to my nature, and unworthy of one whom, however lightly you may now regard his happiness, you once loved.

"Let us forget the past, at least until I can provide you with a home more congenial to your tastes and habits. We can never again be to each other what we once were; but we may still live under the shelter of the same roof, and, by mutual forbearance, replace our lost illusions by a calm and peaceful reality.

"Our position must be a painful and an onerous one, as I well know; but if we both strive to render it endurable, surely we may succeed."

"Mr. Elphinstone," was the cold reply, "the picture which you have sketched is by no means an attractive one. That you have, since you left your home, recognised the cowardice and selfishness of sacrificing your wife to the woman who has supplanted her in your affections, I am rejoiced to hear, as it proves that you are not as yet thoroughly forgetful of your responsibilities as a husband and a father; and for your own sake, I am glad of this, although the fact cannot for a moment affect either my happiness or my determination.

"You are right, I did love you once—truly, deeply, fervently—but that time is past. Ida Trevanion confided in you—honoured you—would have laid down her life to brighten yours—and clung to you through every change of fortune. Ida Elphinstone honours you no longer—confides in you no longer: her idol has been cast from its pedestal, and she has found it clay.

"Do not mistake yourself; it is no sublime and self-abnegating repentance which now leads you to confess and to deplore your injustice; it is simply a sense of the void

which our separation will cause in your future existence. You still love me, in spite of yourself—in spite of the wrong that you have done me,—the indignity to which you have exposed me—and you cannot contemplate without terror the consequences of a final rupture between us. I am still, as ever, necessary to your happiness; and it is for your own sake, not for mine, that you are anxious to avert the evil.”

“Ida, I swear to you, that were I at this moment possessed of the affluence to which I trust one day to attain—were I enabled to place you in the position from which I rashly hurled you down—believing, vain fool that I was! that my love would compensate to you for every sacrifice—I should not now be here, pleading to you to relieve me from self-rebuke.

“Even now, I do not ask of you to pardon anything beyond the impetuous and unconsidered resolution which I yesterday expressed, for, save in that solitary instance, I have nothing to regret—nothing with which to reproach myself. All I entreat—and believe me when I say that I do it earnestly—is, that you will remain beneath my roof, and under my protection, until I am enabled to feel that my ill-omened love has not entailed upon you the misery and suffering of poverty.

“Like yourself, I was weak while I believed that I possessed your affection, but, like yourself, I have acquired strength by trial. I *can* bear to live without you; I *can* dare to look forward to an existence unsolaced by affection; but I cannot brook that the woman I have loved should be exposed to trials, to which she could never have been subjected had she not become my wife.”

“You talk bravely,” said Ida, with a withering sneer; “the future will prove in how far you are justified in using such high-sounding words. Once more, I tell you that I am revenged; I will *not* remain another day beneath your roof.

“I express no gratitude for your assumed anxiety in my future welfare; for, specious as the argument might seem to one unacquainted with your nature, it can never mislead me. In your egotism, you dread the comments of the

world ; the contempt which must attach to a man who, after winning the heart of a trusting woman who had hitherto known nothing of life save its enjoyments, thrust her forth to poverty when she was bold enough to resent her wrongs.

“ Well, sir, to these unsparing comments, to that withering contempt, you shall be subjected. I am no hireling to await in humble submission the good pleasure of a master. I will owe you nothing—I will not even accept as a boon from your hand the guardianship of my child, for you durst not wrest him from me. Unlike yourself, I *have* a regret—I *have* a reproach. I regret that the fortune of the heiress did not enable you to secure the affluence which, in all probability, invested me, in your eyes, with charms that faded under the disappointment which supervened ; and I reproach, not you, but myself, that I was weak enough to be deluded into supposing that such must not inevitably have been the case.”

“ Ida,” said Elphinstone, sadly, “ passion has made you illogical. If it indeed be as you affirm, and that I am in truth guilty of the ungenerous weakness of which I am now accused ; if your loss of fortune, forfeited as it was for my sake, has rendered you less dear to me ; then why should I shrink from the destiny which you have hewn out for me ? How can I love you still with a fervour which you have declared me unable to control or subdue ? By prophesying my life-long misery in resigning you, you still confess your faith in the stability of my affection, and tacitly admit the falsehood of your own accusations ; by fastening upon me the vice of avarice, you divest me of those finer feelings which could alone render my future isolated existence a burthen and a pang. The comments of a world, to which, for your sake, I shall offer no explanation, I shall know how to despise ; its contempt I shall regard as little, until I have compelled its respect. Do not, therefore, delude yourself ; but pause ere you suffer passion to overwhelm your reason. Once more, and for the last time, I entreat of you to have mercy upon us both.”

“ And once more, and for the last time, I refuse to comply with your entreaty,” vehemently replied his wife ; “ my

boy will suffice to me ; and I trust that, for your own sake, you may be enabled to derive equal consolation in the smiles of your mother's friend and her inestimable daughter, or in those of the Lady Mary Maitland, who had the honour of preceding me in your affections, until, like a wayward child, you weary of the new toy as you wearied of the old one.

"The world is wide, Mr. Elphinstone, and you are becoming its favourite ; I should be unwilling to cast one shadow upon the brightness of your path. You have assured me that the fame which you have lately acquired must bring fortune in its train ; enjoy that fortune without scruple and without stint, for, from the hour in which I quit your house, I make no claim upon you ; I reject all favours, all concessions ; I came to you almost penniless, and almost penniless I am content to continue. Console yourself as I shall—if you can."

' And this is your final resolution ?'

" It is."

"So be it, then," was the rejoinder of the young husband ; " I had hoped that the memory of the past—the fate of our only child—might have weighed with you ; but I have deceived myself, and will urge you no further. Only remember, Ida, that a few hours hence, should you repent your decision, it will already be too late. Since you refuse to accord to me even the right of contributing to your necessities, I shall feel little inclination to waste my life in profitless labour, nor shall the name of the man towards whom you have evinced a hatred so unbounded and uncompromising, ever again be intruded upon you. You have nothing more to fear either from my affection or my enmity. As you have justly remarked, the world is wide ; I will make my home beyond the reach of inquiry or pursuit. I am young and strong ; strong in purpose as in frame. Wretched I may be, but I shall at least be a stranger to remorse. I have endeavoured to fulfil my duty to the last ; and, if I have failed, I am content to abide the consequences of my error.

For an instant the firmness of Mrs. Elphinstone forsook her ; there was a depth of feeling in the accents of her hus-

band that fell cold and heavy on her heart ; but she would not yield ; and she was about to utter some chilling rejoinder, when a servant entered, and placed a couple of letters on the table.

Without even glancing at the superscription, and anxious to impress upon her husband that at the very moment in which he was threatening to expatriate himself—thus rendering all possibility of their future reconciliation impossible—she was indifferent to a resolution beneath which she nevertheless quailed, she tore open that which lay nearest to her ; and she was unable to suppress a start of surprise as she recognised, in the lengthy and highly perfumed epistle, the handwriting of Lady Mary Brooklands. A blended feeling of astonishment and contempt impelled her to read it to the end.

Experience had taught her the hollowness of her former friend ; and as this was the first communication which she had received from her since her marriage, a vague suspicion crossed her mind that her astute ladyship must have been impelled by some powerful motive to lavish upon her the laudatory endearments which formed the staple of the missive.

Suddenly, however, affecting to remember the presence of her husband, she held towards him the still open letter, saying as she did so :—

“A letter from your amiable aunt, Mr. Elphinstone. It may, perhaps, interest you to cast your eye over it.”

Sydney received it with a silent bow, but it was merely to fold and replace it on the table ; and he was just about to quit the room, when a wild cry from his wife arrested him. Ida sat motionless, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, and a bulky packet with a deep black border, of which she had just broken the seal, crushed convulsively in her hands.

“Read it, Sydney, if you would save my senses,” she at length gasped out in a shrill whisper ; “read it, for I cannot.”

Elphinstone took the packet from her hands, and instantly detected the familiar characters of Mr. Trevanion.

He, however, evinced no emotion ; be the contents of the letter what they might, he imagined that they could in no way interest himself ; but he erred in his judgment.

Thus, while Ida, panting from agitation, listened with parted lips and starting eyes, he stood calm and unmoved ; and his voice was clear and steady, as its wont, as he prepared to obey her.

Thus ran the letter.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LETTER.

“TREVANION HALL, *August*, 184—.

“WHEN the daughter to whom I had intrusted alike my future happiness, and the realisation of my most cherished hopes, left the shelter of my roof to throw herself into the arms of an obscure and needy lover, I believed that I had for ever closed my heart against her.

“She well knew that through her, and by her, I would alone attain the object to which I had devoted the whole energies of a laborious life ; that I had neither support nor sympathy to anticipate from the woman whom I had made my wife ; that my path towards the goal to which I aspired was beset by mortification ; that my position was a false one ; and that the present was only rendered endurable to me, by the probable results of the future.

“That daughter was my only child, and the disappointment inflicted upon me at her birth, ought perhaps to have prepared me for the still keener mortification to which I was subjected by her marriage. It did not, however, even in the moment of painful excitement, when her sex was revealed to me. I at once felt that the infant, at least, was blameless—that it was an accident of fate ; and I was no sooner satisfied that I had little prospect of again becoming a father, than I resolved to do for the girl, who was destined to be my heiress, all that I would have done for the son who would have perpetuated my name.

“You best know, Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone, how I redeemed the pledge made to myself within a few years of your birth. You best know how care and gold were alike lavished on your infancy, your girlhood, and your maturity ; but what you did not perhaps comprehend was this : that in administering with ready hand to your vanity, your luxury,

and your egotism, in developing your talents, and in affording to you every opportunity of enhancing those personal qualities with which you had been gifted by nature—as if to convince me that the darling project of my life might yet be accomplished—I was actuated less by a weak feeling of pride in your personal and mental endowments, than by a desire to accomplish my purpose.

“Had I left you to the sole guardianship of a fond and mindless mother, you would have grown to womanhood as obscure as herself, and as unworthy to co-operate in my own views; and thus, you would have had no right to aspire to a fate less mean than that to which you saw fit to condemn yourself.

“And now, for the last time—as henceforth the subject must never again be mooted between us—let me impress upon you—that you have deserved no forgiveness at my hands. I trusted in you, and you betrayed my trust. I had confided to you the irksomeness of my position—the humiliation which I had endured from my nearest relatives; I had poured out my heart before you, and made you feel how essential your obedience to my wishes must inevitably prove to my ultimate resumption of the social rank to which was entitled by my birth; and you failed me.

“You fled from my house like a detected felon, and you have paid the penalty of your fault. With ostentatious pride, you left behind you every article of luxury to which the world could have affixed a price; but you strangely overlooked the fact that you carried away with you a father’s hopes and a mother’s peace of mind. Were you less culpable than if you had broken into my strong box, or rifled your mother’s jewel-case of its last diamond? I leave it to yourself to answer.

“You had wealth within your grasp; a coronet at your feet; cupidity and ambition might alike have been satisfied, and you rejected both—for what? To unite yourself to one who deprived you of every worldly advantage—to see your first-born son come into life a beggar—and to welcome the alms of an offended father as a boon from Heaven; while even for those, trifling as the gift would have appeared

in the days when you had not a wish ungratified, you were indebted—not to any voluntary relenting on my part (for my experience has taught me that no human being exists upon the earth who might not be independent of the sordid wants of the world, did he not invite them either by imprudence or dishonour)—but to the intercession of your friend, Lady Malcolm.

“I am far from justifying the interference of a stranger in such delicate matters as those of family differences; and it is even probable that I might have resented her ladyship’s intrusion on the occasion to which I have alluded, had I not been aware that she was one of the most valued friends of Sir Jasper Trevanion, to whom I felt convinced that she would represent your necessities, should I fail to relieve them—a humiliation to which I would not have exposed myself for half my fortune. To her, therefore, and not to myself, you owe the temporary assistance, which I trust proved serviceable to you in your need.

“And now, as I presume that I have enabled you fully to comprehend the nature of our relative positions, I will proceed to explain my reasons for terminating the silence which has so long existed between us.

“You are a wife and a mother; in the first of these capacities I am not only willing, but even anxious, to ignore your pre-existence as much as possible; nor, from all that has reached me, am I inclined to suppose that you are less desirous than myself, to render the chain as light as may be practicable, without exposing yourself to the idle gossiping of a censorious world.

“As a mother, however, the case should be, and *must* be, widely different. Circumstances have occurred, which tend to make the son of Mr. Sydney Elphinstone of considerable importance to the Trevanion family; and these I shall now communicate to you in detail, in order that you may decide upon your future line of action.

“About the period of your child’s birth, and while my uncle Sir Jasper was engaged in preparing the settlements, resetting the family diamonds, and completing the equipages which he had been to town to superintend, previous to the marriage of his son with Miss Edith Malcolm, your cousin

Hubert Trevanion, whose health had long been visibly declining, became rapidly worse ; and, with a want of moral courage, which was, perhaps, fortunate for his successors—as he might (under the blind influence of a first passion, which you will, in all probability, not feel tempted, from your own experience, to doubt) have forced some imprudent concessions from his doting father—he never warned him of the fact of his approaching end, until it became too late for the baronet to divert any portion of the family possessions from their legitimate channel ; and thus he ultimately died, without having effected the slightest alteration in the will which Sir Jasper had executed in favour of him and his heirs.

“ Nor was this all ; for the baronet, utterly prostrated by the suddenness of the bereavement which had rendered his old age desolate—and, mark, Ida, that like you he had flung from him those who might have sustained and embellished his existence, had he done them justice—fell powerless beneath the blow ; physically he resisted the shock, but his mind was less energetic than his frame ; from the hour in which his son ceased to exist, he became a puling idiot.

“ You will think this shocking, Ida, but this is, nevertheless, what men call retribution. In his pride and strength he drove me from his roof ; in his imbecility and weakness I made it safe and firm above him ; in my youth he cast me forth ; in his age I had secured to him the legitimate shelter of his home.

“ I am told that, legally, he was dead, and that I could in my turn have lorded it over his helplessness.—I need not say that I did not do so. My wrongs were sufficiently atoned, and I scorned the baseness of a vulgar vengeance.

“ Thus far, nothing had occurred with which I could not grapple single-handed, without one feeling of misgiving as regarded my own strength ; but more was still to follow, which forced upon me the recollection that I was still a father ; and that, although sinned against almost beyond forgiveness, I was bound to pardon the child who had offended, as well as the relative who had injured me.

“ Four days since, I received a hasty summons to this

place. The physical strength of Sir Jasper Trevanion had failed, but his intellect had been restored to him. I found him on his death-bed, but I already knew that he had long repented his injustice towards me, and I abstained from all reproach.

“As I stood beside his pillow, old memories, indeed, revived, but I thrust them back ; and it was with a true heart and a calm brow that I pressed the hand which he extended to me. But for me, the old man would have been childless and desolate ; like me, he had been for a time proud and relentless ; now he clung to me as to the only being left to him on earth, to whom he could turn for comfort and support—who could save his death-bed from the intrusion of strangers and hirelings—who could close his eyes with the hand of affection, and follow him to the grave with the reverence of relationship—and, as I saw and felt all this, Ida, my heart, long closed against all such emotion, yearned towards you.

“As I forgave in that solemn hour the man who had marred my youth, so did I also forgive you, who had blighted my age.

“He died that night ; and until dawn I watched beside him, alone ; for he had read to me the one great lesson of my life : and while I gazed in silence upon his rigid brow and compressed lips, never again to be unsealed in this world, and which had closed in the utterance of a blessing upon myself for the generosity with which I had requited his injustice, I felt that I could afford to forget all the past. It, therefore, remains for you to assist me in the effort.

“I will not deceive you. The fact that you have a son, who must at my death succeed to the Trevanion estates, and bear the name of my ancestors, has not been without its effect in strengthening my resolution. It were idle to deny that such is the case ; but here, in the house of death, where the light of day is replaced by the glare of waxen tapers, and the voices of my fellow-men by the low whispers which seem to be a foretaste of the hollow murmurs of the burial-vaults, where—after one gloomy pageant—all will relapse into silence, until it again opens to receive my

own corpse, I am startled by the consciousness that I no longer suffice to myself.

"I strive to conquer this weakness by dwelling upon the change that has come over my fortunes; by the reflection that I am now almost fabulously wealthy; by endeavouring to accustom my ear to the new titles by which I am addressed by those about me; and—shall I confess it?—I feel scorn of myself that I should be so unmanned by events perfectly natural in themselves, and which others will regard as utterly common-place, or as mere matter of congratulation.

"Thus it is, however, and you will, consequently, understand that you have once more become essential to my happiness.

"Do not fail me a second time. These morbid feelings will pass away when I am once more involved in the cares and interests of life; and you are well aware that to you alone I can turn with confidence to assist me in the new duties which have devolved upon me.

"Your mother, Lady Trevanion, has no interests in common with myself, save such as affect her own comfort and convenience; no intellect on which I can repose, no judgment to which I can appeal; while, as regards Lady Mary Brooklands, you need only look back upon your own past career to feel that she is precisely the last person to whom I would entrust the care of either my dignity or my honour.

"Thus, Ida, a new career of triumph awaits you. Your former home, and the arms of your father, are open to you; the future existence of your son is defined, and beyond the reach of fate. So soon as the tomb has closed over my aged relative, I shall return to town, where I shall anxiously await you, trusting that your future affection and obedience will obliterate the past.

"You need fear no reproach, entertain no apprehension of my prolonged displeasure. Greatly as you have been to blame, your punishment has exceeded your fault. I am prepared alike to forgive and to forget.

"I forward to you, by this post, a letter from your husband's aunt, which, by some mistake, was sent here with

others addressed to myself. If it be as I conjecture, that her sapient ladyship foresaw the probability of our reconciliation, and has written to reclaim her place in your affections—or, to speak more distinctly, to secure her own future interests, by affecting a sympathy in your trials which she has never felt, do not suffer yourself to be misled by her speciousness.

“She is in heart and soul an egotist; she sacrificed you to the necessities of her nephew, and now she would be equally ready to sacrifice you to her own.

“Once more, Ida, be just to yourself, and hasten to resume your proper station in society. By this day week I shall be again established in that home to which I am prepared to welcome you back, and where I trust to see the hopes which you once blighted in your own person either restored with increased brilliancy, or renewed and realised in that of your son.

“HUBERT TREVANION.”

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

"SYDNEY!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, springing from her seat, and casting herself on her knees, with clasped hands and streaming eyes; "Sydney, we are saved!"

"We are!"

"The past has been a hideous dream; the future is bright before us."

Elphinstone was silent.

"Why do you not speak, Sydney," pursued his wife, "why do you not exult with me in the blessed prospect which has opened upon us?"

"I do indeed rejoice that my most ardent desire has been granted, Ida," said her husband, in the calm accents of deep and concentrated feeling, "that both you and our boy are now secured against all possibility of struggle and privation. My heart is relieved of a weight by which it was crushed to the very earth, and I am thankful, most thankful."

"And yourself, Sydney? What of yourself?"

"Myself," replied the young man, bitterly, "what should I say of myself, save that I exult in the reflection that Mr. Trevanion's daughter will no longer be sacrificed to my necessities."

"Mr. Trevanion's daughter!" echoed Ida, hoarsely, as she rose to her feet, and looked earnestly into his face, "Mr. Trevanion's daughter! Have I then ceased to be your wife?"

"Legally, no, but even that barrier to your future happiness may be removed, should you desire it."

"Sydney, do not torture me! Tell me what you mean."

"Simply that I have interpreted the true sense of your father's closing sentences. I am still too young to suppose that he can have speculated upon my death, when he ex-

pressed so ardent a hope that his dreams of ambition, as regarded yourself, might still be realised. Too young to die, as men commonly understand the term; but still old enough for that death of the soul—divorce.”

A sharp scream burst from the lips of Ida.

“Why should you shrink from such a climax to our married life?” pursued Sydney, in the same unimpassioned tone. “Did you not wilfully deny my claim upon your affections? Did you not, unauthorised and uninfluenced by the sanction of a parent, spurn my protection as an insult, and my roof as a disgrace? Did you not avow that I no longer possessed either your love or your respect? Have you so soon forgotten the contempt with which you rejected my offers of aid—my earnest entreaties that you would allow me to fulfil those duties towards you which I had vowed at the altar? Have we not, from that moment, severed in heart and fact; and do you now quail before a mere form which would liberate you in the eyes of the world, and leave you free to make a nobler and a better choice?”

“Sydney!” gasped out his wife, vehemently clasping his arm, while her whole frame quivered with emotion; “Sydney, forgive me! Poor and helpless, I could have lived without you; or, if the effort had proved too mighty for my strength, I could have died without a murmur, for life would have been valueless without your love; but now—now—on my knees, I implore of you to pity and to pardon me.”

“It is too late,” said Elphinstone, as he turned gloomily away; “one of those tears, one of those supplications, only an hour back, would have sufficed to restore pardon and peace between us; but the moment of reconciliation has now gone by for ever. Even as you spurned my entreaties, Ida, so do I now reject yours. Let it suffice, that one of my family has debased herself by accepting the benefits grudgingly doled out to her by the insolence of wealth; do not hope to force a similar concession from myself.”

“Sydney, have you no mercy, no pity? I have deceived both you and myself. Never, never, did I love you more deeply, more devotedly, than when, in my mad folly, I accused and wronged you—yes, wronged you; I will even

believe that I did you wrong, if you will only once more take me to your heart, and call me by the blessed name of wife."

"You deceive yourself still, Ida; if in the obscurity of our present home you placed no faith in an affection which was subjected only to one solitary trial; if you could not see me evince a brotherly interest in a young and fatherless girl, who had been the playmate of my boyhood, and who had been reared under the eyes of an anxious and high-principled mother—how can you hope to induce me to place any faith in a pledge wrung from you in a moment of strong excitement?"

"Learn to know yourself better. The man who could not escape suspicion under such circumstances would be weak indeed to believe that he could be more secure, when the opportunities of misjudging him were multiplied a hundred-fold. I cannot take you to my heart, Ida, though I cannot pluck you thence; though I do not hesitate to admit, should the admission still afford you one sensation of happiness or triumph, that you alone have ever, or can ever, possess it. I dare not call you wife, for you yourself have repudiated the title."

"For our child's sake——"

"Ida, in my turn I ask, have you no mercy? Am I not to be parted from my child? Have I not completed my sacrifice, and, in return for all that I have done and suffered, I ask but this.

"Let the world condemn me if it will, let your own heart accuse me if it can, but do not let my boy misjudge me; let me at least be blameless and honourable in his eyes. I claim, I demand, this justice; and it is the last appeal I shall make to your generosity. We may never meet again; in a few years I shall have faded from his memory, and, Ida, for the love which you once bore me, will you not promise me that he shall never learn to loathe or despise his father? He will not even bear my name—I know it, but I do not murmur; it is my fate to resign every claim, every tie, which once bound me to an existence of delusive promise, and I submit in silence; yet, still I cannot forget that

I have a child ; that he is very dear to me, and that he is torn away from me for ever."

"And your wife—your wife!" shrieked Ida.

Elphinstone turned towards her as she still knelt upon the floor, her hands tightly clenched together, her long and abundant hair, which had escaped the comb which should have confined it, half concealing her slight figure, and her livid features convulsed with agony ; for a moment he stood gazing upon her as motionless as though he had been hewn in stone ; then his breast heaved, a smothered sob escaped him, a few inarticulate words burst in a hollow murmur from his lips, and with frantic energy he bent down, raised her to his bosom, held her there for a few seconds, and, as he felt her weight grow heavy in his arms, he laid her softly upon a sofa, and rushed from his home.

A month afterwards, Mrs. Elphinstone was the self-widowed inmate of her father's house ; Lady Mary Brooklands was in modest lodgings in a West-End street ; and no trace could be discovered of the young, heart-broken exile, who had abandoned his native land for ever.

THE END.

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